



THE CASE IN COURT.—PAGE 13.



JURY-ROOM TALES

AND OTHER STORIES



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JURY-ROOM TALES.

BY five P.M., we jurymen had had about enough of it. Bilkins, Q.C., had hammered the heads of his argument into us to that extent that our minds were covered with them, and such ideas as we had originally possessed were entirely obliterated. Then Serjeant Silkins had picked out, delicately, as with intellectual tweezers, all the nails that his adversary had thus driven home, and left our minds a blank with the holes in it. The juniors had done their worst upon us also. They had fluttered up and down, preening their gowns, perking up the little ends of their wigs, and reiterating their monotonous note of: 'May it please your ludship,' like legal linnets, and all, in comparison with what their leaders got, for crumbs. It was seven mortal hours since we had solemnly promised the Crier (though he seemed by no means greatly interested in the matter) that we would 'well and truly try and true deliverance make between our Sovereign Lady the Queen and the prisoner at the bar whom we should have in charge and a true verdict give according to the evidence;' it was seven mortal hours, I say, since he had counted us like sheep, and sworn us, and cried: 'O yez, O yez—if any man can inform my lords the Queen's justices the Queen's serjeant or

the Queen's attorney or this inquest to be taken between our Sovereign Lady the Queen and the prisoner at the bar of any treason murder felony or other misdemeanour committed or done by him let them come forth and they shall be heard.' There were no stops in anything he said, and, to us, but very little meaning. We only knew, for certain—let the prisoner meet with whatsoever fate he might—that for *us* there was no escape from a protracted imprisonment. Some feeble efforts had been made by one or two of our number to evade the glorious privilege of sitting on a British Jury, but all had miserably failed. Poor Quiverful, the tailor, had ventured to stammer forth that there was a domestic incident, connected with Mrs Q., expected hourly at home, and that his mind was altogether so preoccupied with it as to incapacitate him from more logical considerations. But upon cross-examination by the clerk of the arraigns, the unfortunate man admitted that the above pretext had served him on two previous occasions already; and, covered with blushes, he took his seat in the fatal pen, confused and cross-legged. Drumfich, an Italian warehouseman, in a town at the other end of the county, being of German descent, had absented himself, though summoned at the last assizes, on the ground of being a foreigner. But he was now made to serve along with us, notwithstanding that he had rubbed up his worst broken English to address the court in protest. The fatal inquiry of whether he had been Naturalised confirmed his sentence, and replying '*Ja wohl*' aloud, he sank down by my side, with a muttered 'Done, by Jupiter'—a British juryman.

If Drumfich had been the untutored alien he pretended to be, his brain would have been clearer than it was that day at five P.M., in the Assize Court at Dimblebury. What a relief to every one of us would have been half an hour or so of foreign and unintelligible eloquence, in the place of that of Bilkins or Silkins! Like a duplicate edition of the *Ancient*

Mariner, each held us by his glittering eye, and double gold glasses, and we could not choose but listen. They had no thought of mercy—either of those learned gentlemen. They would have shot an albatross, and never felt a pang of remorse ; or they would have cheerfully defended another man for doing it, upon the plea that it was not game.

I believe that the license of uncontradicted speech is too great a power to be intrusted to any mere mortal, even though he be a clergyman. I have heard complaints made (in the strictest confidence) concerning the length of even pulpit oratory ; but there are mitigations in church and chapel, which are not to be found in a Court of Justice. In a pew, in order, doubtless, more completely to abstract the mind for the due reception of what the preacher is inculcating, persons sometimes close their eyes, and are permitted to do so ; but in the box the least repose is impossible. My fellow-juryman, Mr Mooney, a most respectable person in the soap-and-candle line, accustomed to an early dinner and forty winks to follow, was as nearly as possible committed to prison, about three P.M., for falling asleep. When we retired to lunch, he had requested me, as foreman, to keep my eye upon him on our return, and to run my scarf-pin at once into his leg if I detected in him the slightest somnolence ; but a disposition naturally humane had prevented my taking that extreme measure. He suddenly fell forward in the very face of Silkins, as that perfect gentleman was telling us we were the most intelligent, the most patient, and the most attentive body of men whom it had ever been his pleasure to address in a court of justice, and made his nose bleed against the front of the box. That blood-letting probably saved Mr Mooney from the degradation of going to jail, to which penalty the judge plainly told him he was richly entitled. It is my belief that a man of his habit of body could never, without some such relief to the system, have continued wide-awake, under the circumstances, for so long a time as was

yet before us. A close and crowded court, a summer noon, a quart of Allsopp recently imbibed, and the reiterations of Bilkins and Silkins, would have been too much for him, had he weighed far less than the eighteen stone he did. The whole Twelve of us were unfortunate in the fact that we were quite inexperienced in the jury business; we did not know how to husband our resources. The majority of us were so desperately attentive at first, that our wits gave way with the tension before the trial was half over. We took more voluminous notes than the judge himself. One of our number—Simperton, a homœopathic chemist—even went the length of trying to put a question to one of the witnesses, which his lordship declined to let him do, upon the ground of its total feebleness and irrelevance. We all considered that we were compromised by this act of Simperton's. We felt that the opinion of the legal linnets in respect to our intelligence sank from that moment lower than ever; their flattery was redoubled after the unfortunate incident, but we could not conceal from ourselves that the admiration they expressed was feigned.

The youthful barrister is, I am afraid, by profession a hypocrite. He smokes cigars, and reads novels, and writes for popular but light periodicals, all under the rose. He feels a just apprehension of his one client coming at any unexpected time into his chambers. He brings his clerk up in the principles and practice of dissimulation; and teaches him, when interrogated as to the whereabouts of his master, to call a billiard-room 'in court,' and to term Whist 'consultation.' It being thus with these young gentlemen in private life, one cannot expect much candour from them when professionally engaged. When they are *not* engaged, they go about with 'dummy' briefs, and a bag full of shavings, pretending that they are. When they preface a statement with 'I submit, my lud,' it is a sign that they are about to be as obstructive, cantankerous, and unsubmissive

as they dare to be. I speak as a jurymen, and one who has suffered much at the hands of wiggéd men. Bilkins, Q.C., for one, has done me an injury which I may forgive, but which it is not in my power to forget. I wish I could. The image of that eminent counsel remains indelible upon my mental retina in spite of myself. It glows and expands thereon (like something phosphorescent in the dark), whenever I am the least unwell, and if I lie awake in the lonely watches of the night, and in my dreams : again he settles his gown upon his herculean shoulders ; again he grasps that handkerchief with which he will now counterfeit emotion, and now mop his manly brow ; again supporting his elbow on his left hand, he obtrusively projects the forefinger of his right towards the unhappy Twelve. You might imagine from his attitude that Bilkins, Q.C., was one of the most undemonstrative, quiet speakers that ever addressed a Court of Justice ; but to carry out that illusion, you must have the great good-fortune to be stone deaf. Bilkins, Q.C., storms like Boreas. Mr Serjeant Silkins, on the other hand, whispers like the south wind, and indulges occasionally in tears, which nature has placed at his command in any quantity. This makes him invaluable for the defence. If Bilkins owes his forensic position to his Lungs, Silkins is equally indebted to his Lachrymal Ducts, which are always at full pressure. The Q.C. reminded us of our duty ; of the sacred necessity of stifling the sentimental emotions, and casting them from our bosoms, for the more convenient reception of the Truth ; of the paramount interests of justice, which we were in that box to further ; and of a number of other things which, Heaven be thanked, this foreman has since forgotten. The Serjeant, on the contrary, giving as near an imitation as possible, in his own tones, of the still small voice of conscience, bade us remember that we were not only jurymen, but men ; that we had not only intellects (of a very superior

quality), but also hearts—loving hearts, to be influenced by the domestic affections [here he looked at Quiverful]: patriot hearts, that, amid the alien pines, panted for their country's vines [here he looked at Drummich], and, in short [here he looked at us all], hearts of the most varied and admirable character, whose dictates it would be worse than idle—it would be criminal—to disobey. He had placed, he trusted, the innocence of the prisoner at the bar beyond all question; but if not—if there was a scintillation of doubt still lingering in the subtle brain of any one of us, let the prisoner have the benefit of that doubt. I would have more easily forgiven both these gentlemen, if they had said what they had to say, and then had done with it. But they returned to the same point again and again. Bilkins stormed in cyclones; the arguments of Silkins eddied in graceful curves, like doves around a dovecot. They were on Circuit with a vengeance. Not to listen, was impossible; but during their respective addresses, and while no witness was being turned inside out by either of them, I occasionally evaded their double eyeglasses and projected forefingers, by gazing upon my fellow-victims in the box. My own temperament is nervous to excess, and therefore I probably suffered more than they, but still I pitied them. They had elected me to be their foreman; unanimously, with the exception of one man, Daniel Crasket, and him I did not pity. Crasket (Juryman No. 10) was by trade a corrugated iron merchant, and he looked like it, every inch of him. His narrow forehead was corrugated with iron wrinkles; so were his great splay hands; and so, I have little doubt, was his heart, if you could but have seen it. He did nothing throughout the proceedings but polish his iron head with his pocket-handkerchief, and sometimes scratch it, which, considering that it was as bald as a bell-handle, was quite inexcusable. He was excessively uneasy and impatient, and every time that he looked at his watch, he took an

after-look at the prisoner, which seemed to say : Why make such a fuss about a person of so uninfluential a position ? Let the judge direct us to find him ' Guilty ' at once.

Of Quiverful, Drumfich, Mooney, and Simperton, I have already spoken ; I was personally acquainted with them all except the second. Young Sunnyside (Juryman No. 11) was also slightly known to me ; he was now a photographer in our town, but it was said that he had formerly been in better circumstances—a clerk in some government office in London, I think. If so, the reverses of fortune did not affect his spirits and good-nature ; and whenever his neighbour Crasket scowled at the accused, he gave the poor fellow a glance also, which bore along with it a Recommendation to Mercy, at least. Behind Sunnyside sat Watkins, the great Dimblebury linen-draper, a tectotaller, a revivalist, and a believer in Turkish baths, but who managed to retain some customers of another sort by telling rather amusing anecdotes of his earlier life, when he was an unregenerate commercial traveller, for the great City house of Narrowwidth and Shortmeasure, which he invariably concluded with the remark : ' But there, I've done with all that sort of thing now.' The name of No. 5 was Winkard ; somebody told me he was a miller, though he was no whiter than the rest of us—and not so white as Simperton after his ineffectual attempt at cross-examination—but I knew nothing of him ; he seemed to be always on the point of exploding with laughter, of bursting with some unparalleled facetiousness ; his eyes dilated, his cheeks swelled, he rolled his body about in humorous enjoyment, but I had only once heard him utter a remark ; he had been perfectly silent while we lunched ; but during the election of a foreman, when the question was mooted (by Crasket himself) as to whether he, Crasket, would not make a better foreman than I or any other man, Winkard had stood my friend ; the matter being put to the vote, No. 5, I say, had broken silence in my favour ; he had looked

steadily at the corrugated iron merchant, and uttered these short but decisive words in a loud tone : ‘Not *him*, at all events.’ Nos. 6 and 7 were Bill and Bob Roosters, cousins, who managed a little dairy-farm in the neighbourhood ; they had not been challenged, but unquestionably they ought never to have sat upon the same jury, for they had only one mind between them. What Bob thought, Bill thought, and *vice versa*. Yet it is probable that both together did not think so much as an average individual. After one or two laborious attempts at taking notes, which they transcribed from one another’s papers alternately, they both betook themselves to eating their pens, during which repast they got coincidently choked, and were very nearly carried off simultaneously. Mr Richards, the only juror I have left unmentioned, had something better to chew than pens, and which kept him much quieter ; he had been a seafaring man during some portion of his life, as a supercargo, and among other marine habits, he had retained that of distending his left cheek with a quid of tobacco. From this luxury it was evident that he derived the most intense enjoyment ; the seven mortal hours of jury martyrdom might have been prolonged to seventy, I verily believe, for all that that retired supercargo cared. He sat, unmoved by the savage ravings of Bilkins, by the tender touches of Silkins, vegetative, imperturbable ; only every quarter of an hour, with almost the regularity of the court-house clock, he moved himself a little backward, made a clear space in front of him by dividing his legs, and silently expectorated.

These superficial characteristics of my companions I observed with interest, for besides doing a wholesale business in the dry-goods line, I am by profession a student of human nature. But let it not be supposed that I was occupied with these matters to the detriment of the important duties which, as Bilkins justly remarked (and repeated pretty often), I had ‘been placed in that box to fulfil.’ The prisoner

and the witnesses had (and I hope, enjoyed) each as full a share of my attention as I could possibly give them, embarrassed as it was by the Q.C. and the Serjeant, and the legal linnetts. When all these wrangled together, like daws, as they sometimes did, the judge would considerably lean forward, and in a few simple sentences unravel the tangle of words, and restore to us jurymen once more the use of our aberrated intellects. It is through him alone that I am enabled now to reproduce the facts of the case upon which we were to pronounce our verdict. In his lucid and temperate charge, they were set forth with great distinctness ; we read therein, as it were, by the clear light of noon, the whole story, which we had hitherto only fragmentarily perused by the lurid glare thrown on it by the fiery Bilkins, or the April haze, made up of tears and sunshine, cast around it by his pathetic rival. It has been more than once proposed—and Heaven send that it may be carried out before I am picked to serve again—to abolish trial by jury ; would it not be a still further step in the right direction if we put a stop to Embarrassment by Counsel ? The following, as nearly as I can recollect it, was

THE CASE BEFORE US.

Frederic Upton, labourer, 22, was indicted for stealing a five-pound note, the property of Richard Underedge.

Underedge was a carpenter in a large way of business, and the accused was one of his workmen. They were far-away cousins ; and in consequence of that relationship, they were naturally more intimate with one another than they would have been had their mutual positions been merely those of master and servant. They had lived in the same house for several years, and, except during the last twelve months, upon excellent terms ; Upton being a remarkably skilful and diligent workman, of great assistance to the

business, as well as well-conducted and respectful in his behaviour. About a year ago, however, Underedge had been greatly incensed by the discovery that his apprentice entertained feelings of affection for his daughter, Mary Underedge, which were reciprocated by her. He had been excessively violent at first, and threatened to turn Upton out of doors ; but either in consideration of their affinity, and the friendlessness of the lad, or of the loss which his business would suffer from the absence of so able a hand, he did not put that threat into execution. He had, however, extorted an oath from the girl that she would never marry without his (her father's) consent, and forbidden her to listen to the young man's addresses any more. He had also laid upon Upton an injunction of silence upon the forbidden topic for an entire year. By this, he had intended no encouragement to his hopes whatever, but—'most unwarrantably,' said the judge—had assigned that definite period merely to secure the young man's services, which would probably have been otherwise withdrawn from him at once. He had also made a stipulation, that if Frederic Upton should have realised a certain sum by his own exertions at the end of the year, he would permit the intimacy between his daughter and his workman to be recommenced ; but the amount, which was to be earned out of business-hours, was so considerable, that he, Underedge, had held it tantamount to a total prohibition of the engagement. During the year in question, some proofs of ill-feeling had been manifested between Upton and his master, but no open rupture took place ; at the end of the twelve months, however, Underedge was excessively annoyed by his apprentice producing the exact sum that had been stipulated for, and which he averred he had honestly acquired, and demanding the fulfilment of his master's promise. Among this money was a five-pound note, the property of Underedge himself, and which he now accused Frederic Upton of having feloniously stolen.

At the period of this discovery, the prosecutor had exhibited great bitterness, and some malicious triumph, which was severely commented upon by Mr Serjeant Silkins, who sought to suggest from it that the charge was altogether trumped up in order to ruin an ineligible suitor; and the forbearance and unwillingness with which Underedge now gave his evidence were dwelt upon as the tardy awakening of his conscience, shocked at last at the enormity of the wrong he had committed. The account-book in which the number of the note in question had been recorded, was closely scanned, with intent to shew the entry fictitious; and though the cross-examination failed, it is only fair to the learned counsel to say that it was not through over-delicacy in the imputation of motive. It was proved that the master-carpenter's accounts were so indifferently kept that he had not been conscious of any pecuniary loss. The fact, however, remained unshaken, that the stolen note was identical with the note in the possession of the prisoner at the bar. One Mr Morris, the mayor of the country town in which all the parties lived, corroborated Underedge's statement most completely; he had himself once possessed the note, and had given it to his son Francis, along with other moneys, to discharge a large account he owed to the prosecutor. Morris the younger had started immediately afterwards on a tour in America, from which he had not returned; but there was not the least reason to doubt that he had paid that note to Underedge, as the master-carpenter stated, along with others whose numbers were correctly entered in the account-book. It was, of course, strongly urged for the Defence, that the idea of theft was monstrous, since we had the accused actually offering the supposed stolen property to the very man whom he had so recently robbed of it. Upton, however, had not laid it before him with his own hand; here came the pathos of the case, and the opportunity of Silkins; the supposed savings of Upton were exhibited *by Mary Underedge herself* to her

father. The young man had confided to her his secret store, had exulted with her upon the acquisition of the very sum which was intended to be an insurmountable bar to their happiness, and upon some occasion, when her father had spoken contemptuously of her lover and his efforts, she had gone straight to the hiding-place of this treasure, and triumphantly produced it, unknown to Upton, a few days before the expiration of the year—their term of probation. She therefore had been the unconscious instrument of her lover's ruin. During the examination of this interesting witness you might have heard a pin drop, had that circumstance occurred in Court. Even Mooney woke up, and breathed less stertorously; the supercargo suspended the process of suction, the better to listen to her low sweet voice; Bill and Bob Rooster winked at one another in the extremity of their mutual admiration of that young woman. The cruel Crasket nodded grim approval—because her evidence brought the possession of the stolen note directly home to the prisoner.

The girl herself seemed to be a second Jeanie Deans for honesty. She told the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, but in such faltering tones, and with such tender and pitiful glances towards the prisoner, that the very judge was moved. The impressionable Quiverful became the slave of Silkins from the moment of her first appearance, when he sealed the indentures of his bondage with a tear. So far as feeling went, there was scarcely any one in court who did not hope for an acquittal. The prosecutor, as I have said, pressed the charge as lightly as the circumstances of the case permitted him to do; the expenses of the defence were understood to be defrayed by Mr Morris, whose evidence, next to that of Underedge, bore most hardly against the prisoner. This gentleman, as well as many others, gave Upton a most excellent character. They all entertained the highest opinion of his integrity. Many of them had employed

him on various kinds of ornamental work on his own private account, and testified to having paid him such considerable sums of money as would have explained the possession of almost his entire savings. But with all this, there was no explanation of how the five-pound note in question had got into his hands. The prisoner himself would throw no light upon this subject whatever. Mr Serjeant Silkins wearied himself and us in suggesting ingenious solutions of this difficulty ; but he confessed that he had no instructions. The prisoner, said he, was in his opinion as innocent of the crime imputed to him, as any of our own most honourable and upright body—to use the most emphatic and decisive language in his power—but he had committed a grievous wrong against himself (Serjeant Silkins) in refusing to intrust to him the true elucidation of the affair. His own humble efforts as an advocate were, moreover, impeded by the absence of Mr Francis Morris, who would doubtless have made the whole matter as clear to us as the noonday sun ; he had been written to more than once, but the young man was of roving habits, and his address in America so uncertain that it was doubtful whether he had ever received the letters ; if he had, it was probable—nay, it was certain—that he was at the present moment speeding homeward, in hopes to be in time to tender his inestimable testimony : that very morning, the mail from America was expected in Liverpool, and he, Serjeant Silkins, should not be surprised, in case of our deliberations being at all protracted—in the event of our not obeying the dictates of our holiest emotions, and acquitting his injured client upon the spot—if, before we left the jury-room, that witness from the Western World beyond the Atlantic wave should arrive, and place Frederic Upton's character upon a moral elevation loftier even than before.

All this, however, as Bilkins emphatically reminded us, was the merest assertion. Upton himself had declined,

or, in other words, was unable to offer any statement which could exculpate him in the eyes of the Law—and therefore of us—from the heinous crime of which he stood accused.

The prisoner had pleaded 'Not Guilty' in a firm and audible voice, and after that appeared to pay little or no attention to the proceedings, except when Mary Underedge was giving her testimony ; then indeed he grew painfully excited, watched her with looks in which love and pity struggled for the mastery, and when her examination was over, sighed, as it seemed to me, half with pain for her departure, half with pleasure that the cruel ordeal to which she had been subjected was concluded at last. Then he turned his gaze once more whither it had been steadfastly directed from the first—to the great door of the Court, and watched and watched.

If these remarks seem vague or unsubstantiated, I cannot help it. I have set them down exactly as they occurred to my own mind at the time. I was not moved by Silkins ; I was not, I hope, driven into antagonism by Bilkins ; but gradually I became more and more convinced of the innocence of the prisoner at the bar. I had sworn to be guided by the evidence, and by the evidence I had been guided ; for testimony is not to be looked for in the witness-box alone, but even in the dock, and consists not in words only, but in tones and glances, in the nervous movement of a finger, in the catching of a breath—just as on the stage the by-play of a scene often lets the audience into a secret which cannot be gathered from the main dialogue or action.

I am convinced that the judge shared with me something of this belief in the prisoner's innocence from the excessive care with which he endeavoured to divest himself of any such leaning in his elaborate Charge. He summed up, as it seemed to me, with reluctance, decidedly against the accused, but added in conclusion : ' You will doubtless take time to

consider your verdict, gentlemen, upon this remarkable case ;' and so dismissed us from the box, at five p.m., when we retired, in various stages of collapse, to

THE JURY-ROOM.

The scene of our supposed deliberations was a long, low-roofed apartment, whose only window would have looked out into a little back-lane, if it had not been rendered opaque by the art of the glazier. The bare deal table, the twelve uncompromising chairs, which the white-washed walls inclosed, resembled greatly the furniture of the 'public room' at a third-rate tavern ; but at that point the parallel ended, since neither food nor drink was procurable. There was a bell, indeed, which rang immediately outside the door, but it produced no 'Waiter'—only a sarcastic, short-breathed personage, who called himself 'In charge,' and was not so much our body-servant as our jailer.

'Why on earth are we sent in here ?' growled Crasket, pulling out an antediluvian watch, which seemed to have been constructed less for time than for eternity. 'My mind's made up. The thing's as clear as a pikestaff. What do you say, Mr Quiverful ?'

'She's innocent,' replied that gentleman pathetically ; and his mind perhaps reverting from the female witness to the matter that was being accomplished at his own home, he added—'as innocent, sir, as the unborn babe !'

'Drat the man, how his mind runs on women-folk,' observed the iron-merchant savagely. 'I refer, sir, to the prisoner Upton. There can't be two opinions about *him*, I should think. Eh, Mr Rooster ?'

The question was put to Mr Robert Rooster, who immediately looked at his cousin for information, who replied : 'There can't be two opinions, sir.'

'Of course there can't,' corroborated Bob.

'The judge himself said that the matter was quite straightforward,' continued Mr Crasket, upon whom the mantle, if not the silk gown, of Bilkins, Q.C., seemed suddenly to have fallen: 'the opinion of his lordship was that the whole question lay in a nutshell.'

'Lay in a nutshell!' reiterated Simperton, looking about him as if to see if it really did. 'Dear me.'

'Nay,' I objected; 'he only said it would have done so, had Mr Morris the younger been in court.'

'And not being in court, sir, we were instructed to treat him as though he had no existence,' returned the Corrugated stiffly. 'For my part, I doubt his existence. There is good legal authority for that, though I don't quote it, because it's in Latin.' And the speaker looked round in pity upon the unaccomplished eleven.

Now, there are some things which the very best of us can scarcely be expected to forgive, and perhaps at the top of them stands an imputation upon one's Latin. We were fairly rendered speechless with indignation: Drumfich, a man of great classical attainments acquired at the celebrated university of Hohernbrittenjungern, was exceedingly annoyed: even Mr Winkard, who had up to this point enjoyed the conversation immensely after his peculiar fashion, ceased to ripple with satisfaction.

'It would do one all the good in the world to punch his head,' soliloquised Watkins in a whisper; 'and I would too, if I hadn't done with all them sort of things now.'

'Come, gentlemen, we are all agreed, I suppose,' continued Crasket with playful condescension, and mistaking our silence for submission. 'My dinner-hour is 6.30, and I daresay few of you dine later. What say you?'

'Well, I say that you are not our foreman,' remarked Winkard; 'leastways, unless a man can be his own proposer and seconder, and carry his own self *nem. con.*'

The supercargo shifted his quid from the right cheek

to the left—a very strong expression of feeling with him indeed—and expectorated approvingly.

‘I do not wish unduly to bias any man,’ observed I, ‘but if you appeal to me, I feel a strong conviction of the prisoner’s innocence.’

‘His *innocence*!’ exclaimed Crasket, corrugating all over like a caterpillar. ‘Why, whoever heard of an innocent individual with a five-pound note, of which he could give no account, in his possession? Whoever heard of that?’

This was a difficulty the seriousness of which I felt as deeply as my enemy; I paused for a moment in irresolution as to the line of argument to be adopted, when an unexpected ally intervened.

‘We have heard of it,’ observed Mr William Rooster, nodding to his cousin. ‘Bob and I know of a very similar case that happened in our own family.’

‘I am sorry to hear it,’ returned Mr Crasket sarcastically; ‘a fellow-feeling doubtless makes you kind. No relative of my own having been put upon his trial for felony, I feel in a position to do my duty unswayed by sentiment. I am ready at this moment—and I am not likely to change my opinion through staying here—to return a verdict in accordance with the evidence—Guilty.’

‘But suppose the man isn’t guilty after all?’ observed the hesitating Simperton.

‘That rests with *us*, sir,’ rejoined the iron-merchant contemptuously. ‘If we bring him in Guilty, he *is* guilty.’

‘If that is the case, and it rests with *me*,’ observed Sunny-side cheerfully, ‘Frederic Upton is “Not Guilty.”’

A murmur of applause ran through the jury-room, not less decisive because it was inarticulate, save for Drumfich’s ‘Gut, gut,’ which he, moreover, accompanied with a soft clapping of his hands, as if at the play.

‘My constitution is powerful,’ exclaimed Crasket, looking contemptuously at the somewhat slightly-built foreigner;

‘I can last without food for four-and-twenty hours without inconvenience.’

‘Fortunate Briton,’ returned Drumfich admiringly; ‘I have myself a stomach weak, although with a will of adamant. But I have chocolate—much chocolate in a small box here; ha, ha, we will see.’

‘I am thankful to say that I can drop off to sleep at once,’ quoth Mooney, ‘whenever such a course may seem agreeable to the foreman of this jury. Time, therefore, is no sort of object to *me*.’

‘More than one of us may have urgent calls at home,’ remarked Crasket, looking at Quiverful with meaning.

‘More than one!’ exclaimed that victim to the domestic affections sharply, and awaking from what is termed a ‘brown study’—‘Good Heavens! Who said that there were more than one?’

‘I do think,’ urged I, ‘that if we can hold out until after the train comes in from Liverpool to-morrow morning, which may possibly bring with it Mr Francis Morris’——

‘The case is concluded,’ interrupted the iron-merchant decisively; ‘his lordship distinctly stated that it must rest on grounds entirely independent of the arrival or non-arrival of any such person.’

‘Still,’ remarked Sunnyside slyly, ‘the doubts which some of us entertain of his existence would at least be put an end to, if he did arrive.’

‘I don’t know that,’ returned Mr Crasket impatiently; ‘I decline to speculate upon that question altogether. Let us deal with evidence only, and not with conjecture. One would really think that our adverse decision was about to hang this man. In the excessively improbable case of this hypothetical witness’s arrival, and clearing the character of the prisoner, I say, even in the case of this Upton’s innocence, why, what happens, although we should return a verdict—as we are most amply justified in doing—of Guilty? Is it a

matter of life and death? or even of penal servitude? No. While what with the tenderness—I must say the absurd tenderness—of the prosecutor, and the general sentimental feeling in favour of the accused, it is probable that the punishment awarded will not exceed a very few weeks' imprisonment—a mere nothing to a person in his condition in life—a catspaw.'

'Permit me to observe,' interrupted Sunnyside, with a gravity very unusual with him, 'that even a few weeks, nay, a few days' imprisonment, are no light matter to any man.'

'Perhaps you have experienced them yourself, sir,' replied the iron-merchant scornfully.

'I have,' said Sunnyside.

'Upon my word, we have got some very strange people upon this jury,' whispered Crasket in my ear; 'it seems to have been framed upon the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief.'

'I have the fullest confidence in Mr Sunnyside's antecedents,' observed I aloud; 'and I should like to hear his story.'

'And I,' 'And I,' exclaimed several voices, while Mr Mooney, shutting his eyes, observed, with less enthusiasm, that for his part he 'didn't mind.'

'We are not put here to tell stories,' exclaimed the corrugated iron merchant with irritation; 'and, besides, I dislike stories above all things.'

'Nay,' said I, 'with respect to your first objection, if the tale has any bearing upon the important case under our consideration, it surely behoves us to hear it: you have affirmed that the punishment of imprisonment is so light that we need not hesitate to inflict it even upon one who may be innocent; Mr Sunnyside here affirms the contrary, and is prepared to prove it by the narration of a personal experience.'

'And as for Mr Crasket's second objection,' added Sunnyside, 'namely, that he dislikes a story above all things, that

is perhaps only because he has never had enough of them. The Sultan Schahriar (of whom he much reminds me) was not so greatly enamoured of the earlier narratives of Scheherazadé as he was of the later ; and whereas he began to listen, a consort-strangling, imperious, and not-to-be-contradicted curmudgeon, he was transformed, before the entire series was concluded, into an easy-going, unsuspicious husband, of the sea-side-frequenting and novel-reading type.'

'Are you addressing those observations to *me*?' inquired Mr Crasket fiercely.

'Si-lence,' cried I, imitating the crier of the court which we had just left—'silence, if you please, gentlemen all, for

MR SUNNYSIDE'S STORY.'

Which commenced as follows :

'No. 2 is taken at last, aunt!' I exclaimed, as I burst into the breakfast-room one morning.

'You are a day behind the fair with your news, Harry,' said my aunt quietly. 'They came yesterday afternoon—a fat foreigner and his wife, with a few paltry sticks of furniture that a broker wouldn't give ten pounds for. Pretty neighbours we have got at last! I must say that I detest foreigners.'

'Let us hope that the ghost of old Bobjoy will look after them, and frighten them away again at the end of the first quarter!'

'Mr Bobjoy was a very respectable man, Harry,' said my aunt with a little asperity ; 'and I don't see why you should treat his memory with levity.'

'Why, you know, aunt, as well as I do, that ever since the poor old fellow was murdered—and that is now nearly five years ago—the house has had the reputation of being haunted ; and that the landlord has tried in vain to get a tenant for it, though it's the cheapest house anywhere about ;

and if that's not all owing to the ghost of the old bill-broker, I'm'—

'Harry, be quiet!' interrupted my aunt. 'If you had been living here, as I was at the time that shocking event took place, you would never bear to hear it lightly alluded to. Mr Boljoy may have been a miser, as some people said he was—that I know nothing about; he may have been a hard-dealing man in business-matters; but it was a terrible ending to a long life—to be found murdered in bed, and the hand that struck the foul blow never discovered. Mr Boljoy and I were neighbours for a number of years, and I could not help feeling greatly shocked at his tragical end: but as for ghosts, Harry, neither you nor I believe in such rubbish.'

My aunt lived at No. 1 Laverock Villas; the fat foreigner had come to reside at No. 2; Nos. 1 and 2 comprised the whole of Laverock Villas. They were semi-detached; small in size, but strongly built; situated in one of the northern suburbs of London; standing by themselves in a little secluded lane that led out of one of the main roads, and having no other house within a quarter of a mile of them. In front of each of them was a considerable stretch of garden, through which ran a gravelled walk, leading to an open-work iron gate, which admitted you into the quiet lane. I was lodging with my aunt at that time, having come up to London about a year previously, a raw country lad of seventeen, to fill the post of supernumerary clerk in the Stamp and Wafer Office; and I considered that Fate, personified in the person of a stern and uncompromising uncle, had treated me very hardly indeed, in obliging me to give up my bat and fishing-rod, and free open-air life, for a pen and a ledger in a musty office in one of the busiest thoroughfares of London.

I think it was on the morning following that on which I discovered that No. 2 had at last found a tenant, that the

postman dropped, by mistake, a letter into the box of No. 1, which was evidently intended for our new neighbour. It bore the Dover post-mark, and was addressed us under :

À MONSIEUR,

MONSIEUR EMILE PAPPIGNOL,

LAVEROCK VILLAS,

CLOSTJO HIGHGATE, LONDRES.

M. Pappignol was smoking a cigar as he paced slowly round his weed-covered garden ; so I went out at once, and leaning over the wall, handed him the letter, explaining how it had come into my possession. M. Pappignol was overcome with confusion at a mistake which had caused me so much trouble ; but, on second thoughts, the error was entirely redeemed in his eyes, since it had been the means of introducing to him a neighbour at once so amiable and obliging as myself—all poured out with amazing volubility and gesticulation, in very good English, marked only by a slight foreign accent. He was a stout, strongly-built little man, about forty years old ; exceedingly active and supple, considering the amplitude of his proportions. He had short black stubbly hair, which stood out in every direction ; a large, round, closely-shaven face, blue-black in colour on that part of it operated upon by the razor ; immense red ears, in each of which was pendent a small circlet of gold. An expression of benevolence and good-nature was lent to his face by the pair of large spectacles. We were still talking, when Madame Pappignol stepped lightly down the steps into the garden, and plucking a sprig of sweet-brier, and smelling it as she came, paced slowly down the walk towards us. M. Pappignol, taking off his black velvet smoking-cap, introduced Madame to me in the most gallant manner as a countrywoman of my own. Madame smiled a little superciliously, bent her head slightly, muttered something about the fineness of the morning, and lounged away down the

walk, smelling the sweet-brier as she went. A robust, well-built young woman, by my faith ! with plenty of colour in her cheeks to match the poppies in her hair ; with quick-glancing suspicious black eyes, shaded by thick black eyebrows ; with a mouth hard and cruel in all its outlines ; with large white carnivorous-looking teeth ; dressed in thick rustling black silk ; and wearing, even at that early hour of the day, a profusion of rings, and chains, and bracelets, lavishly displayed.

‘Ma pauvre chère Marie !’ said M. Pappignol tenderly, apostrophising his wife’s retreating figure ; ‘you have got this morning by misfortune one of your bad pains of the head, which makes you feel triste and ill, and detracts in some measure from your usual charming manner !’

A few mornings later, as I was going City-ward on my way to the office, I heard myself accosted by name from the top of an omnibus, and on looking up, saw my foreign neighbour seated on the knifeboard, smoking one of his everlasting cigars. He signalled to me to get up beside him, and I complied. He was dressed for the day in a blue coat with brass buttons, fastened tightly across his expansive chest, and had on a hat with a very curly brim. In his white chubby hands, on which shone three or four valuable rings, he carried carefully a green gingham umbrella, faded and baggy, which he evidently regarded with considerable pride.

‘Like yourself, I too am going to the City this morning,’ said M. Pappignol, as he offered me a cigar. ‘I am man of business to-day. I go to make a call on my banker. After leaving my banker, I shall go to Regent Street, for to-morrow will be Madame’s *jour de fête*, and there I shall look out some pretty bagatelle, as a surprise for *ma petite*, when she rises from her couch in the morning. Then I shall return to my villa and my early dinner ; after which Madame and I will play *écarté* till bedtime. Voilà tout !’

He laughed gaily, and hummed a little air, beating time

with his umbrella on the roof of the 'bus. When we alighted at the Bank, I found it impossible to get rid of him till I had joined him over a *petit-verre* to the health of Madame at the nearest tavern.

It was shortly after this, I remember, that I was seized with a violent attack of toothache, which lasted, on and off, nearly a week, and allowed me scarcely any sleep for several nights. During one of those weary watches, as I was pacing backwards and forwards in my bedroom, with my hands pressed to my cheek, I heard a noise of wheels, distant at first, but momentarily coming nearer, and coming, too, up the quiet lane which led to the two villas. I had no light in my room, so I drew the blind on one side, and looked out. The night was clear and starlit, and presently I saw the dark outline of some advancing object, which next minute I recognised as that of an ordinary cab. It stopped opposite No. 2 ; but while it was still some distance off, M. Pappignol came out of his house, hastened down the garden, and opened the gate ; even in the dark, he was easily recognisable by his bulk and his peculiar walk. Three men alighted from the cab ; and the driver, apparently after a few words from M. Pappignol, turned, and drove back the way he had come ; while M. Pappignol and the three strangers, two of whom were evidently laden with something either in a box or a bag, walked quickly and silently up the garden, and disappeared in the house. Mysterious, certainly, to say the least of it !

Utterly worn out with walking about my room, I sat down after a time on the window-sill, which was of the roomy old-fashioned kind ; and the pain in my face being lulled in some measure by the cold, I lapsed after a while into a troubled sleep, which must have lasted for two or three hours, for when I opened my eyes again, daylight was just beginning to break. While I was still looking out, I saw a figure glide down the gravelled walk of No. 2, open the gate,

and disappear at a rapid pace down the lanc. Ten minutes later, the proceeding was repeated by a second figure ; and ten minutes later still, by a third. What could be the meaning of it all ?

M. Pappignol was lounging over his garden-gate, enjoying his matutinal cigar, as rosy, as fresh, as smiling as ever, when I left the house that morning on my way to the office.

‘Good-morning to you, Monsieur Sunnyside !’ he said in his blandest tone, as I emerged from the gate of No. 1. ‘Haie ! haie ! I regret to see that you suffer from something this morning. You do not look well.’

‘It’s the toothache, and be hanged to it !’ I exclaimed petulantly.

‘Madame suffers from the same malady then and now,’ said Monsieur sentimentally. ‘I feel for you, my dear young friend. My heart is touched. I am ashamed at myself to enjoy such great health while you suffer so much ; but truly the air of these parks’—sweeping the horizon with the end of his cigar—‘is so pure, so health-giving, that ever since I came here I eat like a horse, as you English say, and sleep like a top. Last night, for example, I go to bed as the clock strikes ten, and in less than five minutes I am fast asleep ; and I sleep, sleep, sleep all night like a dormouse, and never awake till the clock strikes seven this morning. Ah ! the air of these parks is truly fine !’ and he slapped his expansive chest triumphantly, and bade me a smiling good-morning.

‘Either Monsieur Pappignol has just told me a barefaced lie,’ I muttered to myself as I went on my way, ‘or else what I saw during the night was a delusion of my own brain, and I only thought I saw it. Anyhow, it’s no business of mine.’

When nearly a month had passed away, during which time I saw very little of our neighbours at No. 2, I happened

to be invited by my friend Fred Simpkins, who was in the same office with myself, to make one at his birthday-party. Although Fred was three or four years older than I, we were great cronies; and as I was considered in those days to have a tolerable voice for a song, and had some knowledge of music, Fred made a great point of my being there on the eventful occasion. I mentioned the matter to my aunt, and took the precaution to put the latch-key in my pocket, knowing that I should not reach home till some time in the small hours of the morning. The party was a pleasant one; my voice was in good order; I sang my best songs; received my due meed of applause; partook of rather more wine than was good for me, as young men are in the habit of doing on such occasions; and set off towards home about two A.M., feeling perfectly satisfied with myself and all the world. My nearest way home was by a short-cut through the fields, which brought me, in about ten minutes, to the outside of the low wall which bounded the garden of No. 1 on the north. A leap, and a short scramble, landed me safely among the flower-beds. I was standing on the step of the front door, fumbling with my latch-key, trying, in a feeble-minded way, to find the keyhole, which seemed to have unaccountably vanished, when the sound of approaching wheels struck my ear, and the same moment there flashed across my memory the scene I had witnessed from my bedroom a few weeks before, and M. Pappignol's speech to me the following morning.

'Ha, ha! Pappignol, my boy,' I muttered to myself as I replaced the latch-key in my pocket, 'I'll see who your nocturnal visitors are this time, you stout old reprobate.'

Close to the wall that divided the two gardens, grew an ash-tree of considerable size, which, though it was now late autumn, still retained sufficient foliage to effectually conceal any one—at least by that imperfect light—who might choose to perch himself among its branches. Towards this tree I

made my way as speedily and as silently as I could, and two or three springs placed me safely among the branches, with my feet resting on the garden-wall. It was the freak of a young fellow who had imbibed rather too much wine, carried out on the impulse of the moment, and was a sort of proceeding which my sober everyday senses would certainly never have approved of. All this took very little time to accomplish, and the cab, or whatever it might be, was still some distance away; but as if the inmates of No. 2 had been on the watch for its arrival, the front-door was opened just as I had got fixed in my position, and M. Pappignol stepped lightly down into the garden, and hastened towards the gate; at the same instant I heard the rustle of Madame's dress as she stood in the doorway of the villa. I remember that it struck me as something singular that, so far as I could see, there was not a single light of any kind visible in No. 2—door and windows were alike dark. The cab had stopped by this time. M. Pappignol had the garden-gate ready opened. Three men got out as before; and after a few words from the Frenchman, the driver turned his cab, and went back the way he had come. The three men came leisurely up the pathway, passed close under me, and entered the house, two of them being laden with boxes or packages of some kind.

‘Got some pretty gimcracks for you this time, mistress,’ said one of the men in a low voice, evidently addressing Madame Pappignol.

‘Have you?’ she said with a little laugh. ‘Why, I’ve almost got more already than I know what to do with. Been lucky this time?’

‘More than ever, mistress—more than ever. There will be nice pickings for all of us. Ah, Mr Pappignol is a clever little chap, and no mistake!’

The clever little chap had lingered for a minute or two at the gate, apparently in order to hear the last of the cab;

when all was silent again, he turned back towards the house. He had got within a yard or two of the tree in which I was hidden, when suddenly one of the bricks on which I was standing gave way, and slipped from under my feet, and in trying to save myself by clutching one of the branches of the tree, I fell head first to the ground just in front of the astonished Frenchman, and striking my forehead as I fell against a sharp piece of flint, felt a flash of fire shoot from my eyes through my brain, and knew nothing more.

On recovering my consciousness, I found myself in utter darkness, and thought for a moment or two that I was lying snugly in bed in my own little room in No. 1 ; but this illusion was of very brief duration, for I quickly discovered that I was still dressed, even to my overcoat, and that my bed consisted of nothing more than a heap of straw, with some coarse sacking thrown over it. The front of my shirt and my face were wet, and there was a dull aching pain across the front of my head ; and putting up my hand, I felt a great gash in my forehead, from which the blood was still slowly oozing : at the same instant all the circumstances of the evening flashed across my mind, down to the moment in which I fell from the wall right across the path of M. Pappignol.

But where was I ? A question not easy to answer. I rose to my feet, feeling very faint and dizzy, and stretching out my arms, advanced cautiously, step by step, like a blind man, till my hands encountered the rough dry surface of an unplastered brick wall. Guiding myself by this wall, I traversed in a minute or two completely round my dungeon, for by no other name could I call it. It was small in size, being, as nearly as I could judge, about ten yards long by six yards wide, and having but a single opening into it, by means of an iron door at one end, now firmly closed, as I was not long in testing. When I had made these discoveries,

I groped my way back to the heap of straw, and sat down on it to think. By whom had I been shut up there, and for what purpose? The Frenchman could hardly have done it; there was too much jovial good-nature about him for me readily to lay such a thing to his charge. Was there? Had I not from the very first a secret distrust of him—a half-felt conviction that his candour and good-nature were altogether assumed? But allowing all this, and even granting that I had surprised M. Pappignol in the transaction of some business which he evidently wished to be kept secret, still, where was there sufficient motive for an imprisonment so singular and cruel? To answer such a question as this, I had, of course, nothing but the merest conjecture; the great irrefragable fact, that I was a prisoner, still remained.

On putting my hand into my pockets, I found that they had been emptied; my watch, my purse, and even my pen-knife were gone. There might perhaps be some one within hearing; if so, it would be well to let them know that I had recovered my senses; so I groped my way to the door again; and putting my mouth to the keyhole, called aloud again and again with all my strength. But there was no answer; darkness and silence reigned supreme. Very sad and sick at heart, I crept back to my pallet, sat down on it, and resting my head between my hands, gave way to the bitter thoughts suggested by my situation; and so sat, hour after hour, with a sullen patience, waiting for the coming of I knew not whom.

At last a sound—after an age of waiting, as it seemed to me—as of some one unlocking a distant door; then I heard slow, heavy footsteps descending a flight of stairs; then a fringe of light shone under the door of my cell; the footsteps came nearer; the fringe grew brighter and broader; then the iron door was unlocked; another moment, and it was flung wide open, revealing the extensive figure of M. Pappignol completely blocking up the entrance. In one

hand he carried a life-preserver, in the other he held aloft a small bronze lamp. I now saw him for the first time without his spectacles ; with them had vanished that expression of candour and benevolence which I had never accepted as altogether genuine. The glance, at once sinister and malicious, which emanated from his large gray eyes, had much more of reality about it, and accorded far better with the expression of his other features.

I had time to glance round my dungeon, as well as my dazzled eyes would allow me, before the Frenchman leisurely removed his cigar and spoke. I found that my estimate as to the size of the place was tolerably correct. The roof was low and arched, and there was no window, nor any opening into it other than the door, which, as stated before, was of iron, and which I now saw had a number of small circular openings both at top and bottom, intended, probably, for the purpose of ventilation.

An iron door ! I understood it all now. Soon after my arrival in London, when my aunt was telling me the story of Mr Bobjoy's murder, she mentioned, among other features of the case, that he had caused part of his cellar to be shut off by means of an iron door, so as to form a fireproof receptacle for the custody of the various important documents confided to his keeping by his clients and debtors. It was also said, I remember, that he always kept a large sum of money locked up here, which he used to come and gloat over at midnight, counting the yellow piles of sovereigns again and again. There was some comfort in the thought that I was so near home ; that I was only divided by a couple of walls or so from my dear old aunt, who by this time was probably wondering and pondering over the unaccountable absence of her scapegrace nephew.

‘Good-morning, my young friend,’ said M. Pappignol cheerfully. ‘I hope that your new apartment is to your liking.’

‘So little to my liking,’ I replied, ‘that I care not how soon I leave it.’

‘Haie, haie ! my dear infant, you are in a great hurry to be gone. I cannot afford to part with you so readily. You are my guest for the present, and are likely to be so for I know not how long a time.—Do you hear, my little one ?’ he added, turning to his wife, who had followed him noiselessly down-stairs, and was now peering over his shoulder. ‘Monsieur Sunnyside is already tired of our hospitality, ingrate that he is, and wishes to desert us !’

‘Spy ! eavesdropper !’ hissed Madame from between her clenched teeth ; ‘lie here till you die like a cur, as you are. Undeceive yourself at once ; here you are, and here you will stop for weeks—perhaps, for months—who knows for how long !’

‘Softly, my Marie,’ said M. Pappignol, laying his hand gently on his wife’s arm ; ‘do not excite yourself, I pray you. The young man thought he would busy himself with the secrets of his neighbours, and behold the consequences.’

‘Whatever your secrets may be, I know nothing of them,’ I said. ‘Nothing that I either saw or heard, were I ever so much inclined to injure you, would avail me for that purpose.’

‘I know well that you could not injure me, were I to set you free this moment,’ said the Frenchman with a sinister smile. ‘Emile Pappignol is too much good citizen to be afraid of that. Still, you might perhaps talk, and it is better to keep you shut up here for the present. Say, is it not so, *ma Marie* ?’

‘You are right, Emile, as you always are.’

Indignant and stung to the quick though I was, I was far too weak and ill to offer any resistance, or make any effort to force my passage out, which, indeed, under the circumstances, would have been simply madness ; I could do nothing but submit for the time.

M. Pappignol paused for a moment to kiss the hand of Madame, and then turned to me again, and resumed in a gayer tone: 'Besides—it is agreeable to the romance of my feelings to have a prisoner in my dungeon—a second Baron Trenck, another Monsieur Latude, without the genius of those eminent men for breaking out. I feel like a seigneur of the *moyen âge*; my villa expands into a castle; I think seriously of buying a suit of armour.—The fanciful extravagance of an infant, you perhaps think. Be it so—I am an infant in everything but size and age.'

He paused to light a fresh cigar at the lamp. 'Seriously, my young friend,' he resumed, 'I am too tender-hearted, too much good chicken, not to treat you well, provided you remain here quietly till it is convenient for me to open your prison-door; but try to escape, and my little sweetheart here,' tapping the butt-end of a pistol which peeped out of the folds of his waistcoat, 'will look carefully after you, and give you something as a souvenir of Emile Pappignol! *Allons, ma Marie*; breakfast is waiting for us.'

'You will at least give me a light and some water?' I said.

'A little patience, *mon ami*, and your wants shall have attention.'

An hour or two later, a surly Frenchman in a blouse and cap, whom I never remembered having seen before, brought me some breakfast, and while I was eating it, fetched me soap, water, and towel; some court-plaster for my head, and a large empty box to use as a table; and, greatest blessing of all, left me the lamp when he went away, for I felt as though I must have gone mad had I been left to brood much longer in that horrible darkness. He visited me again, towards evening, I suppose, bringing me not only something to eat, but a blanket and a large rug as a protection from the cold; then, having trimmed the lamp, he left me for the night. All my efforts to draw him into conversation were

fruitless ; all that I could get out of him was a single sentence in guttural French, repeated again and again : ‘Monsieur, one is forbidden to speak here.’ Further than that, he was resolutely dumb. As far as I could judge, he was entirely unarmed when he came to visit me, but he was invariably accompanied by a large and savage dog, which squatted itself gravely on its haunches close to the door, and regarded me with a distrustful eye, evidently only waiting for the proper signal from its master to fly at my throat and drag me to the ground.

The villa was well built, with thick walls, and substantial floors, and plenty of solid brickwork about it, so that but few sounds, and those very faint ones, ever penetrated the depths of my dungeon ; indeed, long spaces of time often passed, during which I sat on my pallet, or paced wearily round my cell, so cut off from even the faintest sounds of external life, that I might have been buried alive in the heart of the great pyramid, for anything I could have told to the contrary. Fortunately for me, my dungeon received an adequate supply of fresh air through the circular openings I have already mentioned, the main body of the cellar being supplied through a grating in one of the outer walls of the villa, whence I got it at second-hand, but tolerably pure.

Twice every twenty-four hours, I was visited by the surly Frenchman ; M. Pappignol, too, came for two or three minutes each day, to satisfy himself, I suppose, that everything was right. He called me his dear Silvio Pellico, his edition of Baron Trenck bound in calf, and gave free vent to his sardonic humour : he was like a fat Mephistopheles, jesting and mocking at everything and every one, himself included. Madame came with him sometimes, but after that first visit she rarely spoke to me, but stood, cold, silent, and disdainful, by the side of her husband, till he was ready to return to the upper regions again.

It was either on the fourth or fifth day of my imprisonment, I cannot be certain which, that an unusual commotion overhead, which reached even the depths of my cell, fell on my ears, and I sat listening to it for some time, wondering vaguely whether it would result in any change of condition to myself. After a time, I heard the upper door opened, then a light footstep, and the rustle of a dress, and I knew that Madame was coming to visit me. Next moment, I heard her at the door.

‘Hist! hist! Mr Sunnyside, are you awake?’ she said.

‘I am here,’ I replied, approaching the door. ‘What do you want?’

‘We are going to leave this house, all of us, and at once,’ she said. ‘I have here the key of your cell. I will give it you on two conditions: the first is, that you will not make use of it for a full hour after I leave you; the second is, that when you are free, you will not tell any one where you have been, nor anything you have either seen or heard in this house. Promise this on the word of a gentleman, and you shall have the key.’

I hesitated a moment. To forego all idea of vengeance, to give up every hope of bringing Pappignol to account, was not pleasant to me just then. But, on the other hand, were I to refuse the proffered terms, I fully believed Pappignol to be capable of leaving me locked up to die of starvation. My desire for revenge was not quite powerful enough to induce me to run the risk of a fate so terrible.

‘Decide, and quickly,’ said Madame impatiently; ‘I cannot wait here any longer.’

‘I agree to your terms,’ I said.

‘On the word of a gentleman?’

On the word of a gentleman.’

‘Good. Here is the key,’ and she pushed it under the door. ‘Farewell, and a speedy deliverance to you!’ and with her little metallic laugh, she hurried back up-stairs.

In a few minutes, the commotion overhead ceased ; I heard a distant door clash violently, and then all was still.

An hour to wait—only a single hour, and then I should be free ! I hugged the key ; I pressed it to my lips ; I laughed aloud in my happiness ; and then I believe I cried a little ; but they were tears of joy that I should so soon quit that dark dungeon for ever ; so soon see again the blessed daylight, and mingle among my fellow-men. My dear old aunt, too, how surprised and delighted she would be to see me ! She must have given me up before now as lost or dead. It would seem like a resuscitation from a tomb.

Terribly long seemed that hour during which I waited with the means of freedom in my hand. I had no watch or any means of measuring the time correctly ; but after the first ecstasy of my thankfulness had in some measure subsided, I set myself to walk slowly from end to end of my cell for a fixed number of times, which I knew would more than fill up the remainder of the hour ; for having given my word, I was determined rather to exceed than fall short of the appointed time. So to and fro I slowly paced, keeping the key clasped firmly in my hands, knowing minute by minute that the allotted number was decreasing, dwindling slowly but surely till one by one they were all gone. Then, with a great sigh of relief that the moment of my deliverance was at last come, I inserted the key in the lock, and gave it the usual turn ; but it would not touch the bolt ; again I tried, and with a similar result. *It was the wrong key !*

When I had ascertained beyond doubt, and by trying again and again, that such was really the case, I staggered back to my pallet like a man mortally stricken. All my courage, all my strength went from me in a moment ; I sank down on my knees, and burst into an agony of tears like any child. All hope of release was over ; a lingering death from hunger and cold, undergone in darkness and

solitude, such was the ghastly prospect which now stared me in the face.

I did not doubt for a moment that Madame had given me the wrong key by accident, not by design. Days might elapse before she discovered the mistake; probably she would never discover it; but even supposing that she did find out the error she had committed, there might be twenty reasons, any one of which would render it impossible to come back merely for the purpose of liberating me. It was true I had the means of prolonging my misery for a short time, having by me several portions of French rolls more or less stale and hard, together with a bunch or two of raisins saved from some previous meals; the earthen pipkin in the corner, too, was half full of water. The lamp would probably burn for eight or ten hours longer, but I was without the means of renewing it. Long, sad, and bitter were my thoughts, as, crouched in a corner of my cell, I brooded over my fate.

I was roused by a perceptible waning of the flame of the lamp to the necessity of making an effort of some kind for my deliverance. But what, in truth, could I do? Nothing—nothing! I could only strive my best to bear the inevitable doom, which was marching with such fearful strides towards me, as calmly, as bravely, as cheerfully as in me lay. What bright pictures of that country home, never more to be seen by me, formed themselves in the yellow nimbus of the flame, as I sat with fascinated eyes watching it slowly dying! They would never know my fate, perhaps, those dear ones; they would think I had gone away of my own free-will without parting word or message; they would look for my return month by month, year by year, till all who knew me died one after another, and a new generation grew up, in whose memory my name would have no dwelling.

But stay, stay, stay! what thought was that—nay, not a

thought, say rather a flash of inspiration, Heaven-born—which shot through my brain a moment ago, and sent the hot blood surging through my veins, and made my heart leap wildly, as though it would burst its bounds! I started up, and seizing the lamp, examined it eagerly and carefully. It was made of iron, in rude imitation of some antique model, and was both heavy and clumsy. The body of the lamp formed a long narrow trough or saucer, with a small handle at one end; an iron cup in the middle held the oil and wick. This cup I now proceeded to unscrew from the body of the lamp, and the latter was then left in my hand, a blunt iron instrument, not unlike a hollowed mason's trowel in appearance. Having realised so much fact out of my moment of inspiration, my next proceeding was to examine minutely the walls of my cell, sounding each of them carefully with my trowel, and trying to find some weak spot where the plaster had given way, or a brick was loose; but in vain; they were all, so far as I could judge, in excellent condition, and without crack or defect of any kind. The lamp was waning perceptibly; I determined to waste no more precious time on a futile examination of the walls, but to set to work at once to carry out the plan I had conceived, which was indeed the only one that seemed to offer even the remotest chance of liberty and life. My plan, in brief, was this: to hew my way, inch by inch, with the help of my trowel, through the brick wall which divided my cell from the main body of the cellar. I judged that this wall would be much thinner, and more loosely constructed than the outer walls of the villa, and could I only succeed in breaking through it, I knew that I could easily make my way out of the cellar, either by way of the grating in the wall, or through the wooden door at the top of the stairs.

I set to work at once, at the likeliest spot I could think of, to pick out the plaster from between the bricks, preparatory

to commencing on the bricks themselves. I laboured on hard and fast for about twenty minutes, and then paused for a while to relieve my aching arms, all unused to such labour. As I stood resting my back against the door, my attention was attracted to two bricks in the wall directly opposite me, which looked by that light much darker and yellower than any of the others, as though they were discoloured by damp. I crossed over to examine them more minutely, hoping to find them somewhat softer than the other bricks, and therefore *more easily* assailable ; but on striking them with my trowel, they sounded as hard and firm as the rest. Still, there was something peculiar about them, something very peculiar indeed, for on pushing one of them with my thumb, it yielded to the pressure, sinking into the wall, and at the same instant one of the square flags close to my feet fell in like a trap-door, disclosing an opening in the floor large enough for a person of ordinary size to pass through.

I pushed the second brick, and the flag resumed its place in the floor. I had walked over it a thousand times, never dreaming of the black cavity below.

I stood like one paralysed ; it was a discovery that literally took my breath away for a time. What if it were the entrance to some secret passage, through which, if penetrated, I might regain my freedom ?

At this juncture, the lamp, which had been gradually waning for the last hour, flared up suddenly for an instant, and then sank into darkness. What a misfortune to be left without light at the moment of making such a discovery ! It would be easy enough to find the bricks again, and so open the trap ; the ugly part of the business would be to venture into the opening without a light, knowing neither how deep it was, nor whither it might lead me. What ought I to do ? Which would be the wiser plan—to go on labouring in the dark, till by slow and painful degrees I had knocked a hole in the wall large enough to squeeze myself

through ; or to open the trap, and venture into its mysterious depths, trusting to my good-fortune to find that way a means of exit from the villa ?

I was still debating this question with myself, when the silence was broken by a faint noise up-stairs, which sounded like the opening of a distant door. With my head bent down to the keyhole, I listened intently. I was not kept long in suspense. The door at the top of the cellar stairs was quickly opened, and the same instant I heard the loud confident voice of M. Pappignol. I had sufficient presence of mind to screw the cup of the lamp into its place, and to spread a few handfuls of straw over the fragments of plaster on the floor, when the door of my dungeon was opened, and M. Pappignol presented himself, carrying a candle in one hand ; followed by his wife, the surly Frenchman, and the dog.

‘How does my young friend find himself this fine morning?’ asked M. Pappignol with a sardonic smile. ‘He did not expect to see his friends back again quite so soon, eh ? We have been on a little tour, have we not, chère Marie ? have we not, Pierre Leblanc ?—a little journey of pleasure, which lasted from six o’clock yesterday evening till ten this morning, and Monsieur here has been good enough to keep the house for us while we were away. Monsieur seems quite happy in the retirement of his *salon*, does he not ? Let me assure him for you, Marie, so that he may do justice to your excellent disposition, that when you left a certain key with him yesterday evening, you thought in good faith that it was the key of this door, and that not till some hours afterwards did you discover the mistake you had made. It was fortunate for us, my little one, that you gave him the wrong key ; otherwise we should hardly have come back here this morning—hardly have had the pleasure of retaining Monsieur as a guest under our humble roof for a short time longer. Leblanc, you will continue to act as the valet of Monsieur.

And now, my child, let us go and partake of some refreshment.'

After one quick glance upward as the door of my cell was opened, I neither looked at nor spoke to my visitors, but sat as silent and unmoved as though I had been alone, with my elbows on my knees, and my head resting between my hands. Truth to tell, I was afraid to look M. Pappignol fairly in the face—afraid lest those sharp eyes of his should see in mine the glad light of hope which I felt was shining through them, and his suspicions be thereby aroused to watch me more closely, or visit me more frequently, and so cut off all chance of escape.

'Cannot you let him go, Emile?' I heard Madame say in a low voice, just as her husband was closing the door. 'Cannot you take his word of honour to keep silent, and let him go? Such an imprisonment is enough to drive him mad.'

'No, no, no—a thousand times no!' answered the Frenchman with savage energy. 'Let him go, my faith, at such a moment as the present, when a word from him would bring the whole business about our ears! It was different last night, when we never expected to come back; I must either have let him go then, or left him to starve. But now that we are back again, here he must stay till this little affair is over, and till, as you sing, "the swallows have fled o'er the sea."'

He turned the key as he spoke the last word, and I was left once more to darkness and solitude; but not for long; half an hour later, Leblanc came in with some coffee, and with oil and cotton for the lamp. He did not stay long; and when he was gone, I knew that I should be free from intrusion for several hours. I was burning to penetrate the secret of the trap-door. The coffee had refreshed and strengthened me, and I felt equal to any adventure.

I pushed the brick as before, and the door fell back on

noiseless hinges ; holding the lamp in my hand, I ~~perceived~~ the cavity, and saw a flight of steps about a dozen in number. Down these steps I quickly descended, still carrying the lamp ; and on reaching the bottom, found myself at the entrance to a narrow passage leading away at a right angle from the steps. Pursuing this passage for about a dozen or fifteen yards, I came to another flight of steps, much steeper and narrower than the first. Up these steps I went very slowly and quietly. There were a great number of them, perhaps thirty in all ; but they ended at last opposite a small square iron-bound door, let perpendicularly into the wall, having two small brass knobs in the centre of it. Before venturing to open this door, it was well to consider what might be the result of such a step. I might perhaps find myself in the sitting-room or bedchamber of M. Pappignol—perhaps face to face with the wily Frenchman himself, the thing of all others which I most desired to avoid. Still, it was imperatively necessary, in order to render my discovery of any service, that I should open the door, either now or at some future time. Would it not, then, be well to wait and listen ? If there were really any one in the room on the other side of the door, some movement on their part must sooner or later betray them. So I put my lamp down gently on one of the steps, and putting my ear close to the iron door, listened with straining nerves and bated breath, minute after minute, for I know not how long. But the silence was unbroken by even the faintest sound. Gathering courage at length, I gently pressed one of the brass knobs, and as I did so, I heard the shooting of a bolt, and the same moment the door fell slowly back, letting in a flood of brilliant sunshine, which dazzled my eyes, weakened by long absence from daylight, and blinded me for a minute or two, till a few happy tears came to my relief.

I found myself, when I could look round, at the entrance to a small room, now empty, with the exception of a litter of

empty boxes in one corner. It was panelled from ceiling to floor with some dark wood, and it was one of these panels which formed the entrance to the secret flight of stairs. This room had doubtless been the sanctum of old Bobjoy. By means of the secret staircase, he would be able to visit his concealed treasure whenever he pleased, without any one in the lower part of the house—for the room was on the second story—being aware of the fact. It would serve, too, as a way of escape in case of fire, should all other means of rescue be cut off; and Bobjoy, I knew, had been possessed by an almost superstitious dread of that element.

I stepped into the room. There was but one window in it, which opened into the garden in front of the villa. On looking through this window, I saw M. Pappignol quietly smoking his cigar, as he strolled calmly up and down the gravelled walk, and drew back at once, for fear he should discern my pale face through the glass. Opposite this window was a door; I crossed the floor on tiptoe, and listened at it for full five minutes. Silence everywhere. I then gently turned the handle, but found that it was locked on the other side. It was evident, therefore, that if I were to escape at all it must be by the window. How was it to be done? Easily—easily. Among the lumber and empty boxes piled in one corner of the room, was a coil of stout rope, which had probably been used for packing purposes; all, therefore, that I had to do was to fasten one end of this rope to a bar of the empty grate, and let the other end drop through the window, then slide down it to the ground, and I should be free. But to carry out this plan successfully, I must wait till nightfall; it would not do to make the attempt by daylight, and run the risk of being pinned by Leblanc's savage dog as I reached the ground.

Reluctantly, therefore, but still glad at heart, I retired to my cell by the way I had come, first securing the coil of rope, for fear it should be taken away before I needed it.

All day I waited with as much patience as I could summon to my aid. Leblanc came at nightfall as usual. After his visit, I waited for about three hours longer, which would bring the time, as nearly as I could judge, to about midnight. I then opened the trap as before, closing it behind me this time, and two minutes later, found myself in the panelled room, into which a young moon was brightly shining. It was a work requiring both time and dexterity to open the window without alarming the inmates of the house, but it was accomplished at last ; then the rope was fastened to the grate, the other end thrown out of the window, and, creeping through after it, I slid down, sailor-fashion, and came safely to the ground.

Before daylight next morning, M. Pappignol, his wife, Leblanc, and two other confederates, who happened to be in the villa at the time, were all safely lodged in the nearest police-station.

The heart of Leblanc failed him before the day of trial ; he turned evidence for the crown, and gratified an inquisitive public by revealing all that he knew of the history and antecedents of M. Pappignol. From this confession, it would appear that Leblanc's quondam patron and employer was born in London, of French parents, his father being a scene-painter at one of the theatres. Thrown on the world by the death of both parents, at the age of fourteen, the young Emile, with wits prematurely sharpened, and an inborn distaste for work, went rapidly to the bad ; and before he had been his own master more than six months, was convicted of pocket-picking, and underwent a short term of imprisonment, with, to his great disgust, an accompaniment of hard labour. Thinking, after this experience, that a change of scene was desirable, he turned up next in the house of a relative in France, where he seems to have lived quietly and honestly for two or three years. But the taint was in his

blood ; he could not rest. He had heard much of Paris, and determined to see it ; so he set off one night for the gay capital, taking with him all his uncle's hard-earned savings. His career for the next twenty years was that of a man at war with society ; living by his depredations ; rich one day, a beggar the next ; hunted from place to place ; never feeling sure when he lay down to rest that he might not be awakened by the tap of Justice on his shoulder. From Paris, he went to Marseille, thence to Lyon, and took in turn all the chief towns of France and Belgium, till finally finding both countries too hot to hold him any longer, he determined to return to the land of his birth. No sooner had he landed in England than he set to work, in conjunction with two French confederates and some London thieves, to organise an ingenious and audacious system of robbery, not of private houses, but of jewellers' shops. M. Pappignol himself stood far too high in his profession to condescend to the merely mechanical part of the task ; it was his duty to gather up, with laborious accuracy, the necessary details, only to be arrived at by frequent visits in the guise of a customer to the shop selected ; to organise the whole affair ; to arrange the part which each individual was to play in the little drama ; to give his subordinates their instructions, and leave them to do the rest ; taking himself a minimum of risk, and the lion's share of the plunder. Two successful and highly lucrative robberies, following within a few weeks of each other, had already attested the soundness of M. Pappignol's method of working ; and a third scheme was on the carpet, when his career was brought to a sudden and ignominious end.

To explain the sudden flight of the roguish fraternity from the villa, and their triumphant return the following morning, it is only necessary to state that M. Pappignol, who was an assiduous newspaper reader, finding in his evening edition an account of a cab-driver who had been

examined that morning before a magistrate on suspicion of being concerned in the recent jewellery robberies, took the alarm, and resolved to decamp at once, never doubting that the man in question was the veritable cab-driver whom he had employed, and who was in reality a confederate. In the course of the evening, however, his emissaries brought him word that the man taken was an entire stranger to all of them, and that their own driver was still a free man.

I have nothing to add except that justice meted out due punishment to Pappignol and his gang, and, in a milder degree, to Madame also.

Laverock Villas were pulled down three summers ago, and a new street of glaring stuccoed houses built right across the site of them. The green fields have vanished for ever; and the whole district now forms one of those suburban elysiums, whither our toiling bees love to retire when their day's labour in the City is done.

A murmur of approbation filled the jury-room when Mr Sunnyside had finished his narration.

'Well,' remarked Mr Mooney, 'that must have been a good 'un, to have kept me awake from first to last as it did; the general effect of stories of any kind being to make me feel as if I was between the sheets. That certainly was a story and a half that was, was it not, Mr Crasket?'

'Sir,' responded the iron-merchant stiffly, 'if you mean that the narrative with which we have just been favoured was half as long again as it ought to be, I sympathise with you deeply.'

'Why, goodness gracious, Mr Crasket, you can't mean that,' expostulated Simperton; 'why, I wish it had been twice as long. I got so frightened with that 'ere Pappignol, that if you had given me nitre on a lump of sugar, I couldn't have perspired more freely.'

'You are evidently not much acquainted with literature,'

returned Mr Crasket contemptuously ; ‘ otherwise, you would know that Mr Pappignol is a fictitious character, the offspring of Mr Sunnyside’s imagination : nay, rather he is merely a servile imitation of Mr Wilkie Collins’s *Count Fosco*.’

‘ Oh, indeed sir !’ said Mr Simperton humbly. ‘ But still, how dreadful were the incidents ; how terrible it must be to be locked up even for a few days and nights ; and then that Mrs Pappignol—why, she was more wicked than her husband.’

‘ All foreigners are bad, and foreign women worse,’ remarked the iron-merchant sententiously.

‘ Nay, Mr Crasket, not so,’ ejaculated Drumfich. ‘ It is neither courteous nor correct to speak so. I could tell you a true tale which would disprove that slander.’

‘ Pray, tell us, Mr Drumfich,’ urged I, touched by the mild remonstrance of the insulted foreigner.

‘ Pray, don’t sir !’ exclaimed Crasket, almost with politeness : ‘ sooner than trouble you to do anything of the sort I will withdraw my observation.’

‘ Nay, sir,’ said Drumfich firmly, ‘ but you cannot withdraw the effect it may have produced upon these gentlemen here. I am the only foreigner in this room ; I owe it therefore to my fellow-countrywomen to relate the narrative in question.’

‘ Certainly,’ observed I gravely, ‘ it is without doubt that he owes it to his fellow-countrywomen : let us have silence for

MR DRUMFICH’S STORY.

The date is 18— ; the place Karlsruhe ; the name of her who is no more was Anna Tannhäuser. Karlsruhe, as you know, is the capital of the grand-duchy of Baden ; it stands in the plain of the Haardwald or Stag-forest ; and it had its name from the Margrave Karl Wilhelm, who, in 1715, there built himself a lodge, where he might rest from his hunting.

Around that hunting-box, which gradually grew to the dimensions of a palace, rose little by little a town, whereof the houses were all at first of wood. Brick is daily displacing the wooden tenements; but in the early days of Karlsruhe, even the grand-ducal palace was of that humble material. It was in one of the old-fashioned wooden houses that Herr Karl Tannhäuser and his two daughters lived; for Anna had an elder sister, Adelaida. Now, Adelaida was at this time eighteen years old. She resembled no particular heathen goddess; she had neither the large eyes of Here, nor the piercing eyes of Athene, nor the laughing eyes of Aphrodite, but she had exactly the eyes that Hermann von Adelmann liked. Her form put no one at all in mind of Hebe, but there was none that Hermann was better pleased to encircle in the waltz. Her feet were small, and so were her hands; the latter, moreover, had fingers like those of Eos; and such was the magic of their touch upon a pianoforte, that all Karlsruhe wondered. Besides, she dispensed the simple hospitality of her father's house with a grace that charmed the lucky guest; and she displayed towards her aging father himself a sweet commingling of deference and tenderness, that bore witness to her sense as well as to her affection. Her younger sister she preferred to herself—that was evident to all beholders; and her younger sister returned the preference. This should have been a happy family; and happy it was when Hermann von Adelmann wooed Adelaida. Hermann was of good family, and of tolerable fortune, and held an appointment in the grand-ducal household. Herr Tannhäuser played first violin at the Karlsruhe theatre, and gave lessons in music and singing; but forasmuch as in Germany talent is considered by no means vulgar or ignoble, and music holds towards other professions much the same position that poetry holds towards prose, he was rather looked up to than looked down upon, and the well-born Hermann felt honoured by his acquaint-

ance. So Hermann and Adelaida met and loved. The secret of each had been made known to each other, and the moon had witnessed the plighting of their troth one happy night as they walked home from the forest a few weeks before the date of our story.

‘But we must wait till dear Aennchen has made her *début*,’ Adelaida had said. ‘The dear father, I know, will give his consent; but I cannot leave Aennchen till her trial is over.’

‘And when,’ Hermann had replied, rather disconsolately, ‘does your father intend to bring Aennchen out?’

‘Certainly not for a year at the least: you know, dear Hermann, she is only sixteen, and seventeen will be sufficiently early.’

Adelaide had prophesied rightly of her father; he gave his consent willingly, for he loved Hermann well; but the marriage was to be delayed till Aennchen had made her grand *début* at Vienna, or some other great capital. In six months, she was to appear on the boards at Karlsruhe. Of her success there, Herr Tannhäuser had no doubts, for already, in so small a city, her fame had gone abroad; and in six months after her appearance at Karlsruhe, she was to face the fashionable, critical, capricious audience of Vienna, or Paris, or London.

‘Then, my son,’ said he to Hermann, ‘my Aennchen will know her fate; whether our sweet Blackbird is a match for the famous Nightingale, or whether she must retire altogether from the contest: then your marriage will be to us either the celebration of our success, or the consolation for our failure.’

Hermann was fain to acquiesce.

Anna Tannhäuser, or, as her family affectionately called her, Aennchen, had from her earliest years been a marvel to all for her wonderful voice. Her mother had died some years before, but not without prophesying Aennchen’s success, and on her death-bed she exacted from her husband

a promise that he would spare no pains to make their little daughter the first songstress of Europe.

And truly Nature had been gracious to her.

At five years old, she would wander with her mother or her nurse in the forest, and imitate the notes of birds till all who heard her marvelled at her. The feathered *prime donne* themselves would peer down from branch and twig, toss up their beaks amazed, ruffle their plumage offended, and finally, feeling upon their mettle, pour forth defiant carols. At ten years old, she could sing from note, and her natural shake was perfect; and as she grew in years, she grew not only in vocal excellence, but in those external charms without which it is doubtful whether Calliope herself would win favour from certain audiences. Yet she was not beautiful, she was not even pretty; but a high pure soul beamed through her face; the *pose* of her head was elegance itself; her hair was golden-tinted; her figure would have vexed Atalanta, and her arms would have angered Here. Her voice was the common care and common anxiety of Herr Tannhäuser and Adelaida: he attended laboriously to its culture, she to its rest and preservation. 'Aennchen,' she would remonstrate, 'you really must not sing any more,' when a too complimentary visitor would have had her repeat for the third time some difficult passage; for, as has been said, the fame of Aennchen's voice had gone forth into all Karlsruhe, and the inhabitants called her *die Amsel*, or the Blackbird; and of the many who visited Herr Tannhäuser, three-quarters, one might say (who cared to be on the right side of truth), came solely to hear the Blackbird warble. They inquired earnestly after the health of the old gentleman, with one eye on the piano, and they combined their questions as to the well-being of the two sisters with a request to be informed what part Fräulein Anna was studying at present, and with a hope that they might not be allowed to interrupt their performance; for Adelaida of

course accompanied her sister. But the person most interested (to judge from appearances) in Aennchen's progress was Hermann von Adelmann. He was always present to turn over the leaves ; he applauded with the voice of Stentor ; and took umbrage at the least whisper of failure. Had they no good singers, he asked, at the Karlsruhe theatre ? Why, it was notorious that some of the best singers ever heard had come from there. Herr Tannhäuser recollected several who had achieved European reputations ; and yet none of them, by universal consent, could sing like Aennchen. Bah ! failure was an impossibility.

And so six months glided by ; Herr Tannhäuser toiling assiduously, Aennchen practising hopefully, Adelaida aiding sisterly, and Hermann abetting loverly. At last the eventful night arrived when Aennchen was to make her first appearance before the blazing footlights, face the inquisitive stare (paid for at the door) of hundreds of curious eyes, hear unmoved the envious whispers of her scenic sisterhood, and bear unruffled all the fuss of the querulous, nervous manager. But her father gazed fondly up from the orchestra ; Adelaida and Hermann whispered courage from the side-scenes ; and here and there amongst the audience a well-known face smiled cordial sympathy. The grand-duke and the whole court were there ; and the opera was the *Sonnambula*. Suffice it to say, Aennchen was more than successful : bouquets fell thick from the grand-ducal and other boxes ; the whole house rose in a mass, and there was a triumphant shout of '*Es lebe die Amsel !*' (The Blackbird for ever !)

There was joy that night in the little wooden house at the corner of Friedrichstrasse.

The two sisters, on reaching home, had hurried to the chamber which they shared in common, and embraced a thousand times, and wept a thousand tears, but not of sorrow ; had breathed a simple prayer of thanksgiving to the Giver of all good gifts ; and now, with ornaments laid aside,

in simple homely dress, descended to the parlour. A frugal supper was laid, but contentment made of it a feast, and all fell to with hungry zest on *Dickmilch* and *Butterbrod*, and the like uncostly fare. But the blood of the noble vine was there; there was Steinwein, precious and old, than which no better ever gushed from the clusters that hung at Würzburg. For occasions such as this, Herr Tannhäuser had kept it; and filling a glass with the sparkling treasure, he drank: 'The health of the Blackbird! God bless and prosper her! May her success to-night foreshadow her success at Vienna!'

'*Es lebe die Amsel!*' cried Hermann, repeating the words of the shout at the theatre.

'God bless thee, Aennchen,' said Adelaida, as she tossed her bumper bravely down.

Then Aennchen returned thanks; but her heart was full; she had scarce words enough for 'Thanks, dear father,' as she put her arms about his neck and kissed his beaming face, saluted Hermann sisterly, and threw herself into Adelaida's arms. Soon the two sisters rose to retire, and Aennchen said, as she bade good-night: 'God grant the next success I have may find us all as happy as this!'

'Amen! my child,' her father answered; 'twere hard, indeed, to be more happy.'

And Hermann and the old man were left alone.

As a matter of course, seeing that they were Germans, they were soon hidden from each other by clouds of tobacco-smoke; but as it is by no means necessary in a friendly conversation, where you have no desire to try the effect of the human eye upon your collocutor, that you should see him, it formed no bar to their conversation.

'How sweetly,' said Herr Tannhäuser, 'our Blackbird sang. Never before, I think, were her tones so clear: the duke seemed quite enchanted, and so did the Baroness von Edelstein, who is acknowledged to be the first court-judge.'

‘Yes,’ rejoined Hermann; ‘and our dear Aennchen was so self-possessed, than which nothing is more necessary to secure success. I cannot think how she acquired such self-possession.’

‘She trusts in God,’ said the old man sternly; ‘of whom, then, should she be afraid? She exercises her talents to the best of her ability; what, then, should make her nervous? Nervousness results either from vanity or from shocks to the system, or from constitutional weakness; from none of which, thank Heaven, does Aennchen as yet suffer.’

He paused a moment, and then continued: ‘But I should like to hear this Nightingale of whom they talk so much: she came out last season, I believe, at Vienna.’

‘She did,’ answered Hermann. ‘My aunt heard her, and tells me her voice is truly marvellous; but if I understand her, it is a thought coarse; powerful certainly, but rather peculiar than pleasing; she carries you by storm, and not by regular approaches: whereas our Blackbird’s notes appeal to the heart, steal the affections, win the sympathies.’

‘I fear, my son,’ returned the old man with a smile, ‘that we are hardly impartial judges in such a case as the comparative excellences of blackbirds and nightingales.’

And so they chatted till the night was far advanced. At length Hermann departed to his own lodgings; and the old man wended his way to bed, to dream of blackbirds and nightingales and *prime donne*, and showers of bouquets and shouts of applause, and grand-ducal and even royal and imperial ‘bravas,’ and courtiers’ noiseless tapping of gloved hands, and obsequious managers, and large salaries, and endless ‘last appearances’—but suddenly in his dream there was like the snap of a violin-string, and at the snap he awoke. But all was well, and he fell asleep again.

After her success, Aennchen sang constantly, and as constantly improved in voice and in favour with both court and people; so that managers, hearing of her fame, came from far

to judge for themselves, listened to her warbling, and were charmed ; and offered for her services terms which made her father's eyes sparkle. At London, Paris, or Vienna, his Aennchen might now with confidence make her grand début, and if successful—as there was but little doubt she would be—might take her stand upon the ground of the famous Tiddler, and join in the pastime which is there in vogue. An agreement, therefore, was soon entered into that, at the expiration of a few months, Aennchen should commence an engagement at Vienna, and that she should be announced in the playbills as *Die Amsel von Karlsruhe*.

Herr Tannhäuser's heart leaped within him : he had fulfilled, he had every reason to hope, the dying request of his wife ; his long years of toil were about to be rewarded. Already he saw in imagination both his daughters well settled in life—one married to a well-born man of moderate means ; the other, with a fortune acquired by her own talents and his superintendence, wedded—it might well be—to one of high estate.

The months had flown ; the time was drawing near for Aennchen's departure for Vienna. All were in the highest spirits, Hermann in the eighth heaven. He was continually pulling from his pocket, as if by accident, a little box, which, when opened, displayed to view a small plain gold ring ; and the sight of this ring always produced a similar impression upon each of four persons—namely, Herr Tannhäuser, Aennchen, Adelaida, and Hermann. The first (it was not a particularly witty family, and enjoyed very small jokes) always wondered whose finger it would fit ; the second and third always kissed one another ; the third always blushed ; and the fourth always earnestly declared that he couldn't think what it was he had in his pocket, and only took it out to see what it was.

For Hermann and Adelaida, it was arranged, should be

married a week after Aennchen's first appearance at Vienna ; bridemaids had been selected amongst the relations at Vienna of the late Frau Tannhäuser ; the dresses had been ordered ; the breakfast was to be given at the hotel where the Tannhäusers would put up ; and the clergyman had been engaged to perform the ceremony. Moreover, a circumstance had transpired lately which tended to increase the general hilarity.

Herr Tannhäuser, contrary to his wont, had left home for a short time, refusing to say whither he was going, or to explain himself further than to inform his wondering family that business required his temporary absence. When he returned, however so joyous was his look, that it was pretty plain his business had been of a satisfactory nature. As his daughters and Hermann rushed to meet him at their little garden-gate, 'It's all right !' he shouted cheerily : 'I've seen her.'

'What is all right ?' exclaimed three voices together—'and whom have you seen, pray ?'

'I tell you I have seen her, and what is more, I've heard her too.'

'But whom have you both seen and heard—the Sphinx ?' said Hermann ; 'and did you by shrewd answers drive her to suicide, as you will me by your enigmatical assertions ? I adjure you by your duty towards me as your son-in-law elect that you tell me instantly whom you have seen.'

'I can guess,' said Adelaida, but Aennchen was pale and silent.

'Clever miss !' said her father ; 'and pray, whom have I seen ?'

'The Nightingale,' was the reply ; 'I'm sure it is the Nightingale.'

'The Nightingale !' echoed Hermann ; but Aennchen's colour went and came, and not a word escaped her lips.

‘Yes, the Nightingale,’ said Herr Tannhäuser. ‘I heard she was to sing the very part which Aennchen is to take at her début, and I determined to go at any cost, and learn what Aennchen has to fear.’

‘And what do you say?’ cried Hermann and Adelaida together ; but Aennchen was still silent, and still her colour came and went.

‘To say she has nothing to fear,’ was the answer, ‘would be simply telling an untruth, for a more magnificent voice I never heard ; but Aennchen’s has more compass, more sweetness, more flexibility, and I feel as confident as to the result as I do that grace and dexterity are more than a match for less wieldy force. Not that I would have you for a moment to infer that the Nightingale has not great skill ; but Aennchen’s is still more exquisite, still more subtle ;’ and Herr Tannhäuser kissed his Blackbird encouragingly. Then the colour remained in Aennchen’s cheeks, and Hermann and Adelaida breathed more freely.

And now the eventful day arrived when they were to start by *Eilwagen* (or diligence) on their journey to the Kaiserstadt. They arrived in safety, and as they drove to their hotel up Kärnthnerstrasse, they saw, not without a shudder, the opera-house where Aennchen’s fortunes would be made or marred. But a few nights intervened, and then the evening of her trial would come : on one of those nights the dreaded Nightingale would sing, and the question was debated whether Aennchen should go and hear her or not. It was decided that she should, and good results were due to that decision, for it soon got rumoured about that she was in the house ; hundreds of opera-glasses opened fire upon her, and she grew half accustomed to the eye-artillery of those who would be her judges. She was enabled to form an opinion as to the power she must exert to fill the house when full—so different a feat from filling it at a rehearsal ; she was distracted from dwelling too much upon her own approaching

trial, and she could thus measure herself in her own mind with the only person who was likely to be her rival.

The Nightingale sang, and Aennchen was electrified. Such powerful tones she had never heard, but low to her own heart she whispered confidently : ‘My power is less, my art is more : the dear father was right ; I have more compass and more sweetness : I feel I cannot fail.’ And a noble feeling of emulation was roused within her, which moved her to excel herself, just as in olden time a gallant knight was inspired to do the more worshipfully the lustier was his adversary.

‘What thinkest thou, Aennchen ?’ her father said as they parted for the night.

‘Dear father, a still small voice within assures me I cannot fail,’ was the simple trustful answer.

‘Good-night, then, my child. God bless and strengthen thee ; may thy sleep refresh thee, and thy dreams confirm thee.’

‘Good-night, dear Aennchen,’ chimed Hermann and Adelaida ; ‘to-morrow we will greet thee Queen of Song.’ And the four parted cheerfully for the night.

But again that night, Herr Tannhäuser’s dreams were troubled, and he was waked by a sound like the snap of a violin-string. Still, all was well, and he slept again.

The morning came, and with it the rehearsal ; the critics were profuse in praise ; the manager, consequently, was charmed and dissolved in compliments. Slowly, too slowly the day declined, but at last the eventful hour arrived. Herr Tannhäuser had obtained permission to play in the orchestra, that the sight of him might tend to familiarise Aennchen with her new position ; and Hermann and Adelaida were ensconced behind the side-scenes ; so once more Aennchen felt a consciousness of support as her father gazed fondly up from below, and her sister and her sister’s lover breathed courage upon her from the side. The opera was once more the

Sonnambula. The house was crowded in every part ; and when Amina entered in the third scene, she was received with a burst of applause, so graceful was her bearing. But it was evident that at first the audience did not appreciate her voice ; that it was uncommon, they could feel, but it required time to work its subtle effects ; and at the conclusion of the first act there was evidently a division of feeling. Some applauded vehemently, but they were few, and the elegance of her acting might have accounted for that ; for in her plain white dress she looked an angel from above. But the majority kept a dead silence. Some few, being in doubt, hissed, just as, under the same circumstances at whist, they would play a trump.

Herr Tannhäuser was in despair ; moreover, a string of his violin snapped, and he bethought him of his dream ; he boded evil ; he saw the toil of years unfruitful, the hopes of years blighted ; his eyes grew dim, and his soul fainted within him. But soon his courage revived ; the applause at last was more generally diffused. It came at first in those faint, random, dropping beats that resemble the plash of big rain-drops, the precursors of a thunder-shower ; then it grew louder and more regular ; and *Ah ! non giunge* was received with an uproar. Aennchen must twice repeat it, and bouquets and wreaths, wreaths and bouquets fell around her as she sang, till the stage was a garden of flowers. She was called before the curtain to hear repeated shouts of '*Es lebe die Amsel ;*' and every one turned to his neighbour and said : '*Sie hat die Nachtigall überwunden*' (She has beaten the Nightingale).

But the revulsion of feeling was too much for Herr Tannhäuser. The snap of the violin-string was no lying omen ; his nerves had been strung a peg too high ; a chord in his brain had burst asunder, and he fell to the ground insensible. So the victory was that night turned into mourning in the family of the Tannhäusers.

Aennchen and Adelaida and Hermann had all been unconscious of Herr Tannhäuser's fall. Aennchen, as she made her last courtesy on retiring, had just caught a glimpse of her father's face, and had seen him start up excitedly from his seat ; but beyond that, she had seen nothing. She was clasped in mutual, speechless joy in Adelaida's arms, with Hermann watching them sympathisingly, whilst he to whom she owed both her being and her success lay senseless in the arms of strangers. Strangers conveyed him to his hotel, laid him in bed with gentleness, and summoned a physician with all despatch. But how to break the news to Aennchen ? All the strangers shrank from that. Envy herself would scarce have liked to whisper such news in the ears of a successful *débutante*. Now, disagreeable business is considered the perquisite of managers ; on the manager, therefore, devolved the responsibility of preparing our happy trio for the shock which awaited their return.

He was approaching them with the sidelong gait of a bearer of ill-tidings just as Adelaida had said : 'I wonder what can detain the dear father ; he should have joined us long ago. But here is Herr Nickel ; he can no doubt give us information. Pray, Herr Nickel, have you seen my father ?'

'I have but this moment left him, *mein Fräulein*,' said he ; 'and I was to tell you not to wait for him.'

'Not wait for him ! Why, he must go home, and we had better all go together ; indeed, we have been expecting him this long while.'

'He has gone home, *mein Fräulein*,' said the manager sadly.

'Gone ! and without us !' exclaimed the trio in a breath. 'How very shabby !'—'Did he give no reason ?' added Adelaida.

'He was—somewhat—indisposed,' replied the manager

with the air of a prevaricator, 'and—er—slightly—er—overcome.'

Adelaida and her sister exchanged glances, and grew pale, whilst Hermann remarked gloomily: 'It must be more than slight indisposition which could prevent his coming.'

Then the trio took a melancholy farewell of the manager, and drove away home in silence; not a word was spoken, but each was thinking of Aennchen's words: 'God grant the next success I have may find us all as happy as this;' and they seemed like the raven's croak.

At the door of their hotel they were met by the host, an unusual attention, boding no good; he complimented mein Fräulein in anything but a hearty, easy fashion, and as he preceded the party to the sitting-room, he shot continual glances at them over his shoulder, which glances seemed harbingers of ill. When he opened the door, there rose up to greet them not Herr Tannhäuser, but a gentleman whose profession they would have been at no loss to guess even if he had not been introduced to them as Herr Doctor Schwarz. The doctor was of course very polite (for Abernethy was a rule-proving exception), and complimented Aennchen upon her 'stupendous success;' but when he was entreated to dismiss that subject, and tell them fully the condition of Herr Tannhäuser, he grew short and oracular. By diligent questioning, however, they elicited that Herr Tannhäuser must not at present be on any account disturbed; that his daughter's success had been too much for him; that he required long rest and much watching; that Dr Schwarz had, in fact, been forced to send for two colleagues, both of whom were at the moment in attendance on the patient; and at last they wrested an acknowledgment from the reluctant doctor; they discovered that Herr Tannhäuser was dangerously ill, was in a high fever, was even delirious, and required force to keep him in bed. They would at once have rushed to the sick-room, but the doctor restrained them.

Their presence, he said, could do no possible good, and would most likely do harm ; the sight of Aennchen was certain to bring on a paroxysm. He promised to bring them hourly bulletins, and they were forced to be content. Little sleep was there that night for the trio that had been so joyous, little exultation on the part of the successful songstress, little gratulation from her sorrowing companions. All night they kept vigil ; and the next day the violence was a little abated, and Adelaida was admitted as nurse. But Aennchen must be kept carefully out of sight.

For days, Herr Tannhäuser struggled with death. Out-of-doors, the doctor had made cautious inquiries of all the Tannhäuser circle in Vienna, and had had his fears confirmed—there *were* traces of insanity in the family. So Herr Tannhäuser escaped death, but reason was for ever unseated. Meanwhile, Aennchen had, twice a week, fulfilled her duties, for the public servant must stifle grief—the father must play Charles Surface though his child lie dying at home ; and the daughter must warble her sweetest though her father be raving in ‘the padded room.’ So Aennchen essayed to sing her best on the very day when her father had been placed in confinement ; but her eyes were dim, her heart was far away, and her voice was husky with her morning sobs : she broke down.

Now, the public knew not her troubles ; they had paid their money to be charmed ; they were anything but charmed, and grumbled audibly. She broke down again.

This was, from the public point of view, sheer cheating, of which they shewed their proper sense by a vigorous hiss. They didn’t mean any harm ; they merely meant to hint to the manager that the entertainment was not worth half a guinea, or whatever they might have paid ; and that, if the young lady couldn’t sing any better than that, it would be as well to drop the opera, and have a pantomime. They never observed how pale poor Aennchen turned ; how she tottered

as she hurried behind the scenes ; how she swooned in Hermann's arms, who was waiting to escort her home ; and they never dreamed, when the manager came forward, shaking like a top-heavy blanc-mange, 'to apologise for Aennchen's *indisposition*, that they had wounded a fellow-creature to the death. But Aennchen never sang again—except once.

Her nervous system had received a shock from which she never recovered ; from her bed she never rose again ; and for days and nights Adelaida tended her through fever and delirium.

Poor Adelaida ! Hermann had been summoned home by the death of a near relative, just when she needed more than ever consolation, for the doctors had told her that even should Aennchen recover, the hereditary plague would be upon her—her mind would go as her father's had gone. And yet this absence of Hermann's seemed to her afterwards most providential, for it happened on a day that Aennchen fell into a deep sleep, and Adelaida sat by her, and pondered what the doctors had said ; and as she pondered, her eyes were suddenly opened, and 'a horror fell upon her' as she reflected how painful a thing it would be should the hereditary plague descend through her to any children she might have by Hermann ; and the more she thought, the more she was convinced that a woman with such a taint should never marry ; and for a while she sat aghast ; but suddenly her mind was made up, and pale with the paleness of a breaking heart, but a determination not to be broken, she seized a pen, and wrote :

'DEAREST HERMANN—We must never meet again. Do not start, or think me mad. Alas ! that very word should explain my conduct. See you not that what has befallen the dear father, and what the doctors fear for Aennchen, may also come upon me ? As I sat just now and pondered (for Aennchen is sleeping now), a sudden light broke in upon

me—I saw the sin I was about to commit, and, thank God ! in time to draw back. Yes, sin, Hermann ! for how could I answer it to the dear God, that I had been the means of perpetuating a curse amongst his children ? This implies a reproach, you will say, upon them to whom I owe my being. No, Hermann ; they, my heart assures me, erred through ignorance ; but as for me, my eyes are open—alas ! my eyes are indeed open. Therefore, I say, Hermann, we must never meet again. Call me not cruel, or unloving ; my words are the best proof of my love—my hopeless, my undying love. I could not trust myself in your presence ; at your side, my resolution would vanish. And in the name of that love—the more sacred from its very helplessness—let us never meet again ! My heart is broken, but my mind is firm ; I cannot cease to love, but I dare not—nay, I would not—sin against God. “Perchance,” we read in our favourite English poet,

“Hereafter in that world where all are pure,
We two may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine.”

Let that be our consolation. And now, dearest, dearest Hermann, farewell—for ever, on earth. Forgive me, that I must pain you ; pity me, that I must lose you ; and in the name of our sweet, our hapless love, believe me, yours here and hereafter (in the spirit),
ADELAIDA.’

Then came the pent-up tears ; but lest reaction should set in, she left the room, and gave orders that her letter be posted immediately. When she returned, poor Aennchen was awake.

‘You have left me,’ she said querulously.

‘Only for a few seconds, dear,’ was the reply.

‘Ah !’ said Aennchen, ‘I was just dreaming of you : I dreamed that you and Hermann had quarrelled.’

‘O no !’ replied Adelaida ; ‘that can never be.’ And once

more Aennchen slumbered, whilst Adelaida sat wondering what it could mean that her sister should speak so coherently and sleep so peacefully. But so it was for a day or two; Aennchen had such deep sleeps that, without fear, Adelaida might leave her for more than two hours at a time. One day, when she had left her sleeping, and retired to her own room, she was startled to hear a well-known air. The voice that sang was preternaturally clear and sweet; it was evidently her sister's, and more exquisite than even in its best days. She listened, and heard *Ah! non credea* being sung as she had never heard it before. She hastened to the sick-room, and there lay Aennchen all unconscious. '*Es ist die Schwanenstimme*' (It is the swan's voice), said Adelaida below her breath. Suddenly Aennchen opened her eyes, gazed triumphantly at her sister, said plaintively: 'Kiss me, dearest,' and all was over. The voice returned in melody to Him who gave it, and Adelaida was alone.

Fortune had deserted the house of Tannhäuser; the pride of the family was dead; the father of the family was worse than dead; and Adelaida had to win her bread by teaching the pianoforte, for she felt she was unequal to playing in public. The first letter she received from Hermann was fervid, impassioned, full of undying affection, and attempts to prove that her state of mind was brought on by worry and want of rest; soon—for he had judicious parents and friends about him, who thought it a pity for so fine a young man to remain bound to a young woman whom he couldn't marry (they considered the young woman had behaved with great propriety in the matter, for it was certainly a serious matter to marry a mad woman, still, she had only done her duty); and who talked him over cautiously—his letters grew few and cold; in twelve months they ceased, and in eighteen he had married another. The broken heart received another wrench, and Adelaida prayed for death.

Still she laboured in her weary occupation, which rendered her a bare subsistence : and every quarter, to her unbounded astonishment, came an addition to her slender funds with the simple inscription, ‘From one who has gained by the misfortunes of others.’

It was the Nightingale.

Before a remark could be made upon this story, Mr Quiverful, who had been in a grievous state of anxiety and alarm for some minutes, inquired anxiously whether we had heard anybody tapping at the window.

‘Good Heavens!’ cried Simperton, moving his chair with rapidity from that neighbourhood, in which he chanced to be sitting; ‘I wish you wouldn’t, Mr Quiverful; you make a person quite uncomfortable, making observations of that kind at this time of night.’

‘It is past twelve, and very cold,’ observed Crasket gloomily. ‘Time is no object to myself; but remember we might immediately procure an admirable supper, and retire to’——

Here a very distinct tap at the window, as loud as any expression of the Cock Lane Ghost’s, sent the majority of us—and Crasket for once was with it—into the more remote portion of the apartment. Mr Mooney, however, under the impression that it was his shaving-water, grunted out ‘Thank you,’ and immediately went to sleep again; Mr Quiverful exclaimed: ‘Hush! I know what it is. I told ’em to do it in case of our being locked up. It is the news of an addition to my family. If it was a girl, they were to scratch; if it was a boy, they were to rap like that.’

The knock was repeated.

‘Why, bless my heart and body, if it ain’t Twins!’ cried the wretched Quiverful. ‘But all’s well,’ added he, as a sort of tattoo was beaten upon the window-pane. ‘Let us be thankful; it might have been worse.’

‘Worse!’ exclaimed Mr Crasket testily; ‘why, what is Twins, or even Thrins, compared to eleven’——

‘Impossible!’ exclaimed Quiverful, aghast at such a frightful supposition, and turning his ear mechanically towards the window-pane.

‘Compared, I repeat, to eleven jurymen, bent upon destroying their constitutions for the sake of bringing in a verdict against evidence, and a man of my powers of endurance? Was anything more incredible ever witnessed?’

‘Wal, sir,’ returned a voice so sharp and dissonant that it quite electrified us, ‘if you ask that question, I can answer you. *I* have seen *myself* a sight more incredible than that of eleven honest men determined not to be overbragged by a squash-headed, whitlin-of-nothin, sateful old crittur’——

‘Really, Mr Richards,’ interrupted I—for it was the supercargo who was delivering these unexpected remarks as rapidly as they could find expression through his nose—‘I cannot, as foreman of this jury, permit you to use language of this kind; but if you have any personal experience of a striking character to communicate, I am sure it will give us very great pleasure to hear it. In that case, Silence, if you please, Mr Crasket—(I would not give either of them a minute to spit fire in)—silence, gentlemen all, I beg, for

MR RICHARDS’S STORY.*

I beg to confess, gentlemen, that I was born an American; but I believe I am justified in assuring you that it is quite an erroneous idea to suppose that as a people we are prone to exaggerate. The only foundation for that opinion rests, I imagine, on the peculiar humour of writers in our news-

* Translated from the American.

papers who confound wit with mendacity. I know there are many among our people who have travelled extensively, and who, in consequence of the impression which prevails in England on this subject, actually fear to publish an account of their adventures. I should not myself like to do so without suppressing many interesting incidents, and among them one very remarkable one, which, however, I have no hesitation in telling you, since chance has thrown us together for a few hours.

It was once my fate to be within a very little of being wrecked upon the coast of Yucatan ; our vessel, however, escaped with considerable damage ; and while it was being repaired in a certain port there, whose name I cannot trust myself to pronounce, I took an expedition with the chief mate into the interior. We had heard—as most persons have—of the existence of gigantic ruins in that country, reared no one knows by whom, in ages inconceivably remote from our own time ; and although not given to antiquarian research in a general way, yet, having nothing else to do, we entered with avidity upon our researches. For some time, we were entirely unsuccessful ; but after several days we arrived at a village, the name of which the natives pronounced as though it were spelled Xatucoapel. Here we brought the wretched male inhabitants together as usual by allowing them to fill their pipes from our stock of tobacco. All these men seemed well aware of the existence of ruins in the vicinity ; but the man who spoke most on the subject was about the most ruined and miserable-looking of them all. This individual we engaged as our guide ; and with a proper supply of everything it was likely we should require, we set off.

After travelling about five hours, but no very great distance, on account of the badness of the road, we came upon some ruins of the most massive character. They were partly hidden by enormous trees, the diameter of which I

should be afraid to tell you ; but in comparison with them, the largest elm-trees I have seen in England are mere twigs. As well as was possible among such obstacles, we measured the length of the curved wall which inclosed these ruins, or, speaking more correctly, which formed the background. It measured three hundred and seventeen paces ; and its thickness was such, that when the top was perfect, troops might have been drawn up at least six deep to defend it against the attacks of besiegers. Scattered on the ground in all directions were huge blocks of stone, evidently the remains of buildings, half buried among fragments of masonry and herbage. The Indian stood patiently waiting while we examined these ruins, which occupied us till nearly dark, when we set to work to make a shelter for the night. The next morning, the Indian took a heavy knife from his belt, and cut a large bundle of long twigs, which he twisted into several torches while we were preparing breakfast. The mules he tied carefully to trees, and as soon as we were ready to begin exploring afresh, invited us to come with him. The place to which we followed him was between two and three hundred yards from where we had passed the night, and the particular structure to which he directed our attention was a pyramid, so completely hidden among the gigantic trees, that we might have passed within two or three hundred yards of it over and over again without perceiving it. Its base seemed perfectly square, being seventy-three paces on each side. All round it were scattered fragments of stone, which we supposed had fallen from its summit. On the east side we were shewn an opening, and our guide proceeded to light the torches. We had some difficulty in forcing our way through the rubbish which almost blocked up the entrance, but this accomplished, we walked along a passage till we found ourselves in a chamber which appeared to occupy the centre only of the pyramid, the surrounding walls being to all appearance solid, and

necessarily so, considering the enormous weight they had to support. On all the walls of this chamber were figures of various kinds. Groups of men were represented seated on triangular blocks, their legs folded in the eastern manner, with sandals on their feet, and robes which probably reached their knees when they were standing upright. These robes were invariably painted red, and on the breast of each figure was a square white breastplate, on which several characters were inscribed. No two of these breastplates were entirely alike, though the same characters recurred frequently. The tops of their heads were covered with what looked to be a kind of hood attached to, or forming part of, the robe. But the most interesting thing of all was the form of the head. The chin was slightly retreating, the nose large; and the forehead receded to such an extent, that the line from the tip of the nose to the edge of the hood was inclined at the angle of about forty-five degrees. Before one of these groups, an animal, having more the appearance of a lion than any other beast with which we were acquainted, was lying, holding beneath its paw the ends of a number of cords which bound a cluster of individuals of a different type to the seated figures, and entirely devoid of clothing. Adjoining this picture was one which represented the same seated figures, but differently grouped. Instead of being seated in a straight line, they were depicted standing at right angles, with a throne in the background, filled by a seated figure of colossal dimensions. Being represented as facing the spectator, the receding forehead was not so perceptible, but it was sufficiently so to indicate that he belonged to the same race. There were many other groups of great interest painted on the walls, besides innumerable symbols, geometrical figures, and representations of animals, as little like any that we had ever seen as those in any Tom-fool volume of heraldry. We spent the day in examining and sketching these, which were, of course, not only interesting in them-

selves, but had a particular interest for us as travellers, who were the first Europeans to see them.

We passed the night in the chamber, and a part of the following day in a further examination of the ruins. I have already told you that the base of the pyramid measured eighty-three paces.

['Nay,' said I, 'I think you mentioned seventy-three, Mr Richards.'

'Eighty-three,' returned the supercargo with emphasis.] Perhaps for the chairman I may go so low as to say *eighty-two*, but not one pace more do I take off for any man. Well, then, the base of this pyramid measuring thus much, it was easy to ascertain, by means of the shadow it cast, that its present height was quite four hundred feet. We asked the Indian if he had ever climbed to the top. He told us that he had tried to do so, but when he had ascended a good way up, he found the side too smooth to give him foothold; since then, he had made no other attempt. Being desirous of ascertaining what kind of view we should get from the summit, we determined to make the attempt to ascend it ourselves. With the assistance of a powerful glass, we were able to select the side which, from its roughness, gave us the best chance of performing this with the greatest ease; moreover, we had with us some very useful little implements, such as I would advise any man to carry with him who contemplates a journey through forests, to enable him to ascend trees with facility, and which are exceedingly useful under other circumstances. These were my own invention. They were of steel, shaped like the letter U, with sharp curved claws projecting at right angles from the upper part. Even with the assistance of these, the work of ascending the pyramid was so extremely difficult and fatiguing, that if it had not been for the encouragement we gave each other, we should have abandoned the attempt before we had completed half the distance. We reached the top at last, and crawling

a yard or two from the edge, we lay quite still for some minutes to recover our strength.

Our first feeling, on looking round us, was one of great disappointment. In every direction extended a sea of foliage, which fluttered in the gentle wind, that blew steadily at this elevation, and caused the leaves to reflect the bright sunshine with a rustling murmur. Turning our eyes from these objects, we began an examination of the structure on which we were standing. My companion was a few feet in advance of me, and startled me by suddenly exclaiming: 'Take care! here is a hole.' We were so surprised by this discovery—for the mind is so accustomed to associate solidity with erections of this kind—that we stood still for a minute or two staring at it, as though it had been a living specimen of one of the strange figures we had seen in the chamber at the base. When this had passed, we stepped cautiously forward to look into it. It was partially choked with fragments of stone, and we had to remove these before we were able to distinguish that they rested on stone steps. You may imagine our excitement when we made this discovery. By throwing our canvas coats over the opening, we excluded the light, and were thus able to ascertain that we should require a torch before we ventured on descending. No prudent traveller journeys without a ball or two of strong string, and one of these I had in my pocket. Fastening a stone to the end of the string, I lowered it to our guide, to whom I shouted directions to tie some torches to it. As soon as we had pulled up these, we lighted one, and lowering the others down the stairs till they rested on something, we began cautiously to follow them. It was rather a nervous undertaking, chiefly in consequence of the loose stones which lay on the steps, which, if they had slipped away beneath our feet, might have carried us down into the darkness, for aught we knew, as low as the point from which we had started. After a time, which our anxiety made appear very

protracted, we reached the bottom, and found ourselves at the entrance of a vast chamber, into which daylight entered through openings in the walls, carried obliquely upwards. The floor was of smooth stone, and ornamented with coloured stones of a harder kind, and more highly polished, which were let into the pavement in as many different designs as though it were a kaleidoscope. The walls were covered with unintelligible inscriptions, painted with the greatest care, the characters being arranged in horizontal lines, and all of precisely similar size. The variety of these characters excited our astonishment; though there were thousands of them, it was seldom that either of them recurred. We went completely round this room before we discovered that to the right of the steps by which we had descended was another flight of steps. These also we descended, counting them as we went, and at the bottom we found that there were eighty-eight in all; and from the height of these steps, we were confirmed in our estimate of the height of the apartment into which they led us—namely, forty feet. This apartment was the most wonderful I ever beheld. The light was so brilliant, that, coming as we did from the dark staircase, it blinded us for some minutes. The light was admitted through apertures in the wall in the same manner as in the room above, but these were so contrived that the rays fell upon a glittering surface, which threw up a fountain of light to the ceiling, from whence it was reflected in every direction by similar but smaller mirrors fixed at slightly different angles, and also from others which were let into the upper part of the walls. Further examination shewed that, from the glittering circle on the floor, lines of the same material about an inch in width ran in the direction of the openings, the only use of which, as far as we could judge, being to mark the hour as the sun shone along them. Round each mirror, and running in a wave-line below them, was a broad band having a metallic lustre, and to all appearance golden,

but much too high for us to reach by any contrivance at our command. Beneath this line, at intervals of a few feet, were depicted faces gigantic, but of exceeding beauty, a bearded face alternating with one quite smooth, apparently intended to represent a woman. The bearded faces were all of a brown hue ; but the others were fair, with a pink tint in the cheeks, the features being remarkably like those of the white women I have seen in the interior of Morocco. There were a few characters painted under each ; but the inscriptions in this chamber were very few compared with those in the chamber above. Beneath these were numerous niches, and in each niche a small image of some animal—sometimes a lion, a panther, or other familiar beast, but many of them models of animals of extraordinary form, the like of which do not now exist, but which were certainly modelled from a type, as we could see by various minute peculiarities which occurred in all models of the same animal. Most of these were formed of the same lustrous metal or alloy, which still remained untarnished after the lapse of unknown ages ; but there were some specimens made of gold, in which the workmanship was much inferior.

At intervals of five paces, these niches were divided by statues thirteen or fourteen feet high, of the most perfect finish, and formed, as it seemed to us, of red clay. The face was so full of expression, and the whole figure so lifelike, that a single glance was sufficient to fix the portrait on the memory beyond the possibility of forgetting it. At each end of the room were numerous long recesses or shelves, on which were placed vessels of various sizes and shape, some made of gold, and others of the metal we have spoken of ; those of the former metal being invariably of inferior workmanship to the latter. There were no arms of any kind ; and the only implement, if, indeed, it were an implement, closely resembled the trident which Britannia is represented as holding in her hand. The vessels of gold we determined to carry away

with us, and to leave the other things till we could return with better means of transport. By degrees we got some of them to the top of the pyramid ; and taking off my coat, I rolled two or three of the vessels in it, according to their size, and called to the Indian to take care of them, and fasten my coat to the string, that I might draw it up again for more. Having lowered as many as we thought it would be possible to carry away, we decided, though only after much hesitation, on descending still lower into the pyramid. Relighting the torch, we began creeping slowly down the third flight of steps. The chamber which this led us into was totally dark ; and there was a peculiar smell in it which I cannot say was either pleasant or the reverse. In such intense darkness, our torches only lighted up a small space round us. Our first attention was directed to the wall ; but instead of seeing a piece of solid masonry, we saw what looked like a section of a beehive. In each cell we examined we could discern a little within the entrance a dark object. Giving my friend the torch I carried, I laid hold of this, and tried, but vainly, to draw it out. Finding there was nothing else available as a candlestick, I drew off my boot, and we stuck the torches in this, and gave our whole strength to dragging out one of these objects. It was so long, it seemed as if we should never get to the end of it ; and when at last a human face came suddenly full in the glare of the torches, we dropped it as instantaneously as though we had received an electric shock. Of course, we soon recovered from our alarm, but not from our surprise, for from the place where we were standing to the head was several yards. That this was one figure, we supposed ; but it was not till we had stripped off the tissue in which it was enveloped from its head downwards that we could thoroughly believe it. The body was that of a man, and was so excessively hard that to the touch it resembled stone. The face had the deep brown tint observable in the

case of the paintings above, but the rest of the body was fair, proving that in its lifetime it had been enveloped in clothing. We measured its length with great care, by spanning it from head to foot; and we afterwards ascertained that, according to my measurement, it was twelve feet seven inches long; and according to my friend's, three inches more.

The mere spectacle of such a gigantic figure, so little altered from life, that it looked under the torch-light as if it were about to wake from a deep sleep, though the size of the trees which grew close to the pyramid proved it must have lain here for thousands of years, was not without its effect on our nerves; and it was with a feeling almost of reverence that we drew out the figure which occupied a cell in its immediate vicinity. The description I have given of the other applies also to this, the only difference being in the expression of the countenance. Reverently covering the bodies with the cloth in which they had been wrapped, my friend took up our torches, and I was sitting on the pavement, in the act of drawing on my boot, when I was almost struck dead with fright at the sight of a figure silently moving towards us from the blackness which surrounded us. The next instant, I perceived it was the Indian, and with the ferocity which follows a fright when it is found to be groundless, I sprang to my feet with the momentary desire that I could annihilate him. Doubtless he saw by the light which was shining full on my face something that indicated this desire, but he instantly turned and ran into the darkness. I had just time to call him, before we heard a faint cry like the sound which accompanies the sudden expulsion of breath from a man's body, and, directly afterwards, a dull sound as of the falling of a heavy body in a thick liquid. Again and again, we shouted to the Indian, but received no answer. Holding our torches as far before us as we could, we followed inch by inch the direction in which the guide had fled, till we

could distinguish the edge of the opening down which he had fallen. We laid ourselves flat on the pavement, but the light from our torches was too weak to enable us to see anything but the same blackness which surrounded us in every other direction. After exchanging a few words, I left my friend, and made my way to the top of the building, and brought down the ball of string. We tied one of the torches to this, and lowered it down, in the hope of being able to see what had become of the Indian. It had descended some distance, when we began to perceive a brilliant halo playing about it, and almost at the same moment this shot out like a sheet of lambent fire, and in less time than I can mention it, we were looking into a pit of flame, from which there rose a suffocating smoke, with a strong pitch-like smell. Rolling ourselves back with the quickness of thought, we got on our feet, and just as we felt we were about to fall to the ground from the effects of the smoke, we found the steps, and hastened with all the speed possible to the open air. But so rapidly did the smoke rise, that we saw it faintly emerging from the summit of the pyramid before we commenced our descent.

The difficulty of descending was greater than that of ascending ; and bitter was the disappointment which awaited us at the bottom. We expected to see the articles we had lowered lying there, but none were visible. We searched in every direction, as well as in the chamber at the base of the pyramid, but unsuccessfully, and this for several days, during the whole of which time the smoke continued to rise into the air. Whether the Indian had hidden them before he indulged the curiosity which led to the abrupt termination of his existence, or whether other Indians had carried them off after he had commenced the ascent, we could never discover.

We returned to the pyramid afterwards, and ascended it again ; but though undistinguishable from the ground below,

we found that smoke was still issuing from the opening which led into the interior.

And so ends my story.

‘Well, I never!’ observed Mr Simperton, when this extraordinary experience was concluded. ‘And is it your opinion, Mr Richards, that the pyramid is smoking now?’

‘It is impossible for me to say, sir,’ replied the narrator imperturbably. ‘I do not venture to affirm anything which I have not seen with my own eyes.’

‘Did not the smoke affect your vision in any way?’ inquired Mr Crasket sardonically. ‘If the adventure had occurred in England, I should have felt justified in remarking that it was a fiction.’

‘Then you may consider yourself exceedingly fortunate,’ observed the supercargo, taking his quid into his fingers, in order to be very distinct, ‘that the adventure occurred in Yucatan.’

The corrugated iron merchant ‘looked snakes’ (as Mr Richards subsequently observed), but thought it more discreet to utter no remark beyond the monosyllable ‘Ah.’

The supercargo nodded contemptuously; then bringing his right eye to bear upon the rest of the company, he shut it with excessive slowness and sagacity, after which he replaced the precious morsel in his mouth, and became himself again. This proffer and refusal of battle, so obvious although so inarticulate, created rather an unpleasant sensation, and thereupon ensued a silence broken only by the nasal performances of Mr Mooney. At last, ‘As for Yucatan,’ observed Mr Watkins, ‘I never happen to have been there—although I think I remember the name of the village Mr Richards spoke of, in connection with missionary enterprise; but I remember when I was a young man to have had one adventure at least, even in this country, not at all less remarkable than that which has been just described. Mr

Sunnyside was good enough to favour us with a personal experience of rather a sensational character in town ; I think I shall be able to cap it with a recital of something which happened to myself, when I was travelling for Narrowwidth and Shortmesure, in the country. One of Mr Richards's fellow-countrymen played a rather prominent part in it, which perhaps put it into my head.'

'Pray let us have it,' said I. 'Silence for

MR WATKINS'S STORY.'

Narrowwidth was a rich man at the period of which I am speaking, although he has since got into the Gazette. He was never high or haughty to any person in his employment, but to me he was especially civil ; and when it fell to my lot to travel for the firm in Lancashire, in a certain winter, he bade me not pass within fifty miles of Hawthorpe Hall, which was his country-seat, without paying it and him a visit. Well, business took me, about Christmas-time, to Riggdale, within thirty miles of Hawthorpe ; and I wrote respectfully to say that I should take advantage of his invitation, if convenient, and drive over the Fells in the double-gig, or dog-cart as it would now be termed.

His reply was kind as usual : 'Come, by all means ; but take care, if the snow comes on, you don't get lost among the hills. There has been a terrible black frost here for a fortnight, but there are now signs of change.'

Riggdale was duly reached, my horse and trap put up at the *Greyhound*, dinner ordered, and I then proceeded to transact my business in the town. This being done, there was still an hour to spare before dinner ; so I made my way up-stairs to the empty billiard-room, with the intention of whiling away the time in solitary practice with the cue.

I had not been knocking the balls about for more than a few minutes, when I was joined by a tall, thin, handsome

man—of very dark complexion and aquiline features, with large piercing black eyes, and black hair, worn much longer than it is the fashion to wear it nowadays—who, courteously saluting me, inquired whether I had any objection to engage him for a game. I had no objection in the world, so we were quickly doing our best to beat one another; but although I had hitherto believed myself to be tolerably proficient at the game, I now discovered, to my mortification, that I was little better than a novice in comparison with the stranger. There was nothing, however, of the sharper about him; he was a gentleman both in manners and appearance, though, perhaps, just a shade overdressed, according to my notions of the matter, and with rather too profuse a display of jewellery about his very handsome person.

‘You are like myself, I suppose, here for the night only?’ said the stranger, with a bland smile, as he paused for a moment to chalk the end of his cue. ‘I had engaged a post-chaise to take me across the hills to Overbarrow, when one of the horses fell lame, so I was obliged to stop short of my object; and here that insinuating landlord has persuaded me to stay till morning.’

‘Suppose we dine together?’ said the stranger impulsively, as he made a splendid cannon.

Of course, I could make no objection to such a proposition, although I was being ignominiously defeated at billiards, and felt sore thereat; so the bell was rung, and an order given accordingly.

‘Let us be strangers no longer,’ observed my opponent, as he finished the game with a magnificent back-stroke. ‘*Pour moi*, I’m a Yankee by birth and breeding, and there’s my name and address.’

He handed me a card as he spoke, on which, in minute characters, was inscribed ‘MR JABEZ Y. NETTLEFOLD, NEW YORK.’

‘I’ve given myself a holiday for a couple of years,’ said the American, ‘to see the old country, and study your institutions, before settling down to coin dollars for the remainder of my life.’

We spent a very pleasant evening, my American friend and I. We played ‘poker’ together, we smoked, we sang; we concocted and drank sundry mysterious beverages well known to bar-room frequenters on the other ‘side of the Atlantic. Nettlefold had among his luggage a guitar, on which he accompanied himself while he sang, in a rich tenor voice, a number of plaintive Spanish ballads he had picked up while knocking about Mexico. I don’t know what hour it was when we got to bed; but I remember that we shook hands, and vowed an eternal friendship for each other before parting for the night.

After putting out my light, I drew back the curtain, and took a look at the state of the weather—a fine starlit night, crisp and clear, with a few inches of snow on the ground, not enough to impede our journey on the morrow.

It was late next morning when my new friend and I met at breakfast. There had been no more snow during the night, but the clouds were heavy and lowering; and the weather-wise landlord shook his head ominously when we announced to him our intention of setting out in the course of an hour on our journey over the Fells, and intimated to us that we had better stay where we were for the present, as there would certainly be a heavy fall before evening; and there was no place in England so dangerous as the north-country Fells during a snow-storm.

‘All the more necessity for our starting at once,’ I replied gaily. ‘Let the mare be put into the trap immediately; and stow this gentleman’s things and mine away as well as you can, as we are both going the same way, and will travel together.’

Finally, towards noon we found ourselves on the road,

going along at a spanking pace, brimful of high spirits, and ready for any adventure. My companion before starting had brewed a steaming bowl of some insidious compound, of which we had partaken freely ; and to this, perhaps, was in some measure to be attributed my reckless style of driving, and Nettlefold's frequent outbursts in the way of nigger melodies.

The landlord's predictions respecting the weather were quickly fulfilled ; we had not gone more than two or three miles when the snow began to come down heavily. But we were too jolly just then to think or care much about it ; we only wrapped our rugs more closely around us, refilled our pipes, gave the mare her head, and bade defiance to care and dull weather. Neither of us had ever crossed the Fells before ; and we did not leave the *Greyhound* without full instructions from the landlord as to the course we were to take ; but how many miles we had gone before we unknowingly left the right road, and got into some lane that led away into the hills, I never could make out ; neither can I tell for how long a time we had been unconsciously traversing this by-road before we discovered that we were at fault.

The truth dawned on us at last. We were grave and steady enough now ; and certainly the prospect before us was not a pleasant one. We had set off some hours ago, and ought to have been at our journey's end by this time ; yet there we were, traversing an unknown road that led away, interminably, as it seemed, into the heart of the Fells ; and the snow still coming down as I had never seen it come down before. Every few minutes, a great blast of wind came rushing and rumbling down from the gullies of the hills, and half-buried us in a swirling cloud of powdered flakes. Here and there, in hollows of the road, the drift had already accumulated to such an extent as to be almost impassable ; and the mare began to labour heavily. The afternoon was closing in rapidly, and still no sign of hamlet

or farm. What was to be done? To turn back would have been worse than useless: there was evidently nothing for it but to struggle blindly forward, trusting to our ultimately reaching a habitation of some kind.

The last flicker of daylight was dying out through the storm, so that we were close upon the house before we saw it—a rude, low, one-story habitation, built of the great rough unhewn stones of the country; built evidently to withstand the furious winter-gales which rage in those parts; cheerless enough to look at under any other circumstances; but just then, to us poor, belated travellers, a very haven of rest and safety. Above the door hung a half-defaced sign, bearing the name of James Mattinson, with the usual declaration as to the sale of ale and spirits. The door was quickly opened in answer to our summons, and the landlord himself came out.

‘One of the three hunchbacks of Damascus,’ whispered Nettlefold in my ear. A thin, wiry, little man, about forty years old; with a wild mop of red hair, and a beard to match; with an astute foxy sort of face, and quick watchful eyes; with plenty of energy and activity about him, in spite of the deformity indicated in the American’s remark.

‘How far is it from here to Hawthorpe Hall?’

‘Fifteen good miles.’

‘And how far to the nearest village?’

‘Six miles at the least.’

‘Would it be possible to do that distance this evening?’

‘Well, if your horse was fresh, and you knew the road very well, you might mebbe manage it; otherwise, you’d stand a chance of being smooored in the drift. I shouldn’t recommend you to try.’

‘Then I suppose we shall be obliged to stay here till morning?’

‘I fear there’s nothing else for it, sir, though the accommodation’s only very poor—in fact, we never take in folk for

the night, except it happens, as it has with you, that they get weather-bound among the Fells; for the place is only a poor roadside public for the use of farmers and drovers passing over the hills.'

There was evidently nothing for it but to make up our minds to pass the night where we were; so we got down without further delay, and after shaking off some portion of our white covering, crossed the lowly threshold of the *Green Bush*.

We found ourselves in a room of considerable size, poorly and sparsely furnished, as was only to be expected, but having at one end of it a cheerful fire, blazing in a large old-fashioned grate, in close proximity to which we quickly seated ourselves. This room, as we afterwards discovered, served the purposes of kitchen, parlour, and tap-room in one. Beyond it, on the same floor, there were only two small bedrooms and a large pantry, all opening out of a passage which was lighted at the other end by a small grated window; over it there was a loft or lumber-room, open to the rafters, and only to be reached by means of a ladder through a trap-door, in one corner of the kitchen. The strong homely furniture was, with one exception, made of plain deal, scoured to an exceeding whiteness; this exception was a quaint black oak chest, about six feet long, which stood in a corner near the fire—a chest covered with carved work of fruit and flowers, and fanciful arabesques, and interlaced letters repeated again and again; and which at once brought to my mind the old song of *The Mistletoe Bough*, and the story of Francesca in Rogers's *Italy*.

The landlord entered in a few minutes, having duly attended to the requirements of my mare, a matter which I verified by personal inspection later in the evening.

'You don't live here all alone, landlord?' said I interrogatively.

'No, sir, not commonly,' he replied. 'But my old woman

and the girl went down this morning into Overbarrow to do their bit of marketing ; and there they're likely to stop till the roads are open again.'

These words did not convey a very reassuring prospect to the American and myself.

'Have you got anything in the house you can give us for supper, landlord ?'

'Nothing, sir, but a rasher of bacon, some eggs, or a Welsh-rabbit ; and some middling home-brewed ale.'

We gave our orders accordingly ; and speaking for myself, I may say that I never enjoyed a meal more heartily in my life. After supper was over—dinner and supper in one—the landlord, with a sly smile, produced from some secret recess a brown stone bottle full of prime old rum ; and then, having seen us fairly at work with our meerschaums, and having heaped up a tremendous fire, he solicited leave to retire for the night ; and, mounting the ladder, disappeared through the trap-door, having arranged the two little bedrooms, to the best of his ability, for the accommodation of his unexpected guests.

After the landlord's departure, we sat for some time drinking and smoking in silence. My companion looked pale and haggard, and I noticed that once or twice he pressed his hand to his forehead, as if in pain. 'Are you ill ?' I said to him at length.

'Not ill exactly, *ami*,' he replied with a melancholy smile. 'It's the shadow of an old pain that comes over me at odd times—a bagatelle—not worth talking about !'

Grave and taciturn as two Indians, we sat smoking for another space ; at length the American laid down his pipe, got up, and began to pace restlessly about the room ; suddenly he stopped in the middle of the floor. 'I will *not* think about it !' he exclaimed, grinding out the words from between his clenched teeth ; and next moment he burst into a jovial students' song, trolling out the verses at the top

of his powerful voice, and winding up with a wild Ha-ha chorus ; waking unwonted echoes in the old house, till the night-capped landlord popped his head for a moment through the cavernous opening in the roof, doubtful, perhaps, as to the sanity of one or both of his guests.

‘That has done me good, mister,’ said Nettlefold, as he came and sat down and resumed his pipe. ‘I’m in a queer humour to-night. I must talk. *Le diable le veut*. So I’ll tell you of a fight I once had with a grisly among the Rocky Mountains.’

‘Good,’ I replied. ‘Let us have it, by all means ; nothing better for a long winter’s night.’

So Nettlefold proceeded to tell the story of his fight with the bear ; and when that was done, went on to relate one wild story of frontier and Indian life after another, as fast as he could tell them ; as though, like the Ancient Mariner, a spell were on him which he could not resist ; and, finally, he finished up the evening by reciting from memory *The Hunting of Pau-Puk-Keewis* (if I heard the gentleman’s name correctly) from Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*.

‘And now to bed,’ he said, as he stood up and yawned. ‘Rouse me betimes in the morning, for I’m somewhat of a sluggard ; and let us have an early breakfast, and try to make our way through the snow to some civilised part of the world.’

He shook me by the hand, bade me a hearty good-night, took up a candle, and lounged off into one of the little bedrooms which opened out of the passage leading to the back of the house. For myself, I declined having anything to do with the other chamber ; it was too small and stuffy to suit my taste ; and I had decided to take up my quarters for the night on the old carved chest, and at once proceeded to put my intentions into practice. Before settling myself for the night, I took a last glance through the window. The wind was hushed by this time, and the snow had ceased to fall ; a

clear cold night, full of promise for the morrow. Comforting myself with this reflection, I pushed the carved chest closer to the fire, and having laid down my black bag to serve for a pillow, and wrapped a couple of travelling rugs round me, I blew out the flaring tallow-candle, gave a last look to the fire, and in five minutes more had sunk into a heavy dreamless sleep.

When I awoke, it was still night ; the fire had died down to a bed of glowing embers, which diffused a dim ruddy light around, sufficient to render the room and its furniture clearly visible, while leaving the corners in partial shadow. I awoke suddenly, with a sense of horror upon me such as no nightmare had ever inspired me with ; and in my first waking moment could not call to mind the place in which I was ; but a second glance round brought all the circumstances of the day to my recollection. I attempted to move, to get up, but found that I could not do so ; I was perfectly helpless ; and casting my eyes along the length of my body, I saw, with the most intense astonishment, that I was fastened down by a thick cord, wrapped round me again and again, to the carved chest on which I had made my bed for the night. Who had done this ? and for what purpose ?

Though my arms and legs were strapped tightly down, my chest was left sufficiently free to enable me to turn my head readily from side to side, and thus see everything in the room except what might be immediately behind me.

For a moment or two, I imagined myself to be alone, but on turning my head more fully to the right, I saw that I was mistaken. On the large folding-table which stood close under the window of the room, was squatted a figure so strange ; so hideous, that in those first waking moments it might not unnaturally have been taken as the self-created illusion of a brain diseased. But not for long could I repress the conviction that the grim, dark, silent figure before me was as much a reality, as much a being of flesh and blood as

myself; and gradually, as I looked more earnestly, the clear-cut aquiline features of Nettlefold seemed to evolve themselves familiarly out of the hideously grotesque mask with which they were overlaid. Yes, it was certainly my American friend, and no one else; but in what a costume!

As far as I could judge, he had divested himself of every article of civilised costume usually worn by him, except a red woollen shirt; over this he now wore a gaudy and voluminous red and blue travelling rug, in which he had cut two holes for his arms, and which was fastened across his chest with an iron skewer, which he had picked up somewhere in the house; and held round the waist by a gay scarf, in which were stuck a revolver, a tomahawk, and a murderous-looking bowie-knife. His feet were covered with a pair of Indian moccasins, which I remembered to have seen him wear as slippers on the previous evening; and in his long black tangled hair he had stuck a couple of peacock's feathers, taken from over the chimney-piece of the little bedroom. But the most singular feature of his transformation remains to be told. Having found a quantity of yellow paint in some odd corner of the house, he had daubed a circle round each eye, and marked an elaborate pattern with it on his face and neck, which gave him, in that half light, a horribly weird and grotesque appearance. Finally, he was sitting cross-legged on the table gravely smoking a long-stemmed pipe of red clay.

But what struck a colder chill to my heart than anything else was to see the hard, cruel, murderous look in these black glittering eyes bent so steadily and persistently on me; it seemed to me as though my pleasant new-found friend had suddenly died, and that some wandering fiend from the nethermost regions, finding the empty shell, had crept into it, and now mocked me with a horrible semblance of him who was no more.

'Nettlefold, what means this fool's trick?' I said at length.

‘Release me at once. The joke has been carried far enough.’

He neither smiled nor spoke, only answered me by that steady unwavering gaze from his cruel black eyes. In spite of myself, my heart sank deeper within me, and I could not help betraying my anxiety when I next spoke.

‘Come, release me ; there’s a good fellow,’ I said. ‘The joke is an admirable one, no doubt, but, upon my life, I can’t see the point of it ! Release me, sir ; do you hear ? or you shall pay for it when I am free again !’

Still no answer, no light of recognition from those fiendish eyes. Instead of making any further appeal in words, I determined to try the effect of my own strength ; but after a long and desperate struggle to break away from my bonds, I sank back breathless and exhausted, only more firmly bound than I had been before.

Turning my head, after a time, in the opposite direction, I saw with surprise, for I had not noticed it before, that the ladder which gave access through the trap-door to the loft was no longer there, so that all means of communication between the two rooms were removed ; but whether the ladder had been taken away by Nettlefold or by the landlord, I had no means of judging. While thus looking, I saw, and the sight made me give a start of surprise, the white face of Mattinson peering down on us through the trap-door. He, at all events, was safe for the present, and in some measure free. My start of surprise did not escape the vigilant eyes of the American ; his glance, following mine, saw the face in a moment ; the next, his revolver was out, and a bullet went crashing into the framework of the door, missing the landlord’s head by a hairbreadth only. The American, with a guttural ‘Ugh !’ of disappointment, put back his revolver into his belt, and resumed his pipe without another word.

A horrible conviction had been gradually forcing itself on

my mind, and now I could struggle against it no longer—Mr Jabez Y. Nettlefold of New York was undoubtedly mad. There could be no question on the point, for on that supposition, and that alone, could his extraordinary conduct be accounted for. The shot fired at Mattinson, who, as far as I knew, had offended him neither in word nor deed, enlightened me as to the extent of my own danger, which only needed a glance at the fiend-like expression in his eyes to receive confirmation most complete. As I lay there, bound and helpless, I had time to imagine all that was likely or unlikely to happen to me; time enough to summon up whatever of fortitude or patience I possessed to meet with calmness the fate which loomed so closely before me. My young life, with all its ambitions, fears, hopes, and jealousies, about to come to a sudden and ignoble conclusion in a lonely country inn, far away from all who knew or loved me?

How long I had lain thus, whether hours or minutes only, nursing these bitter thoughts, I cannot tell, when I was roused by a movement on the part of the American. He put down his pipe, leaped off the table, and seizing a great log of wood, threw it on the fast-decaying embers; then taking his bowie-knife out of his belt, he deliberately proceeded to sharpen it on the hearthstone. When the edge was to his mind, he went back to his seat on the table, and fixing me again with his relentless eye, addressed me as follows: ‘Dog of a pale-face, listen! Once I was a white man like thee, but a Great Spirit came to me as I lay asleep—whence he came, and what was his name, I cannot tell, for on these points my mind is confused—and he laid on my brow a finger that seemed to scorch and wither up my brain; and he said to me: “Arise, and go back to the wigwams of thy people, for thou art not a pale-face. Many moons ago, thy fathers dwelt on the prairies, and fished in the great lakes, and hunted the buffalo, and were braves among the red-men, and their blood runs in thy veins. Get thee hence,

and take with thee the scalps of as many white men as shall be given into thy hands ; so shalt thou be honoured among thy people, and thy name shall be Soan-ge-taha, the Strong-hearted." And when the Spirit had done speaking, he put his hand into my bosom, and plucked out my heart of flesh, and put into its place a smooth flint stone, worn and polished by the action of the waves ; and he said : " Pity and fear shall be alike unknown to thee. Go ; and the first white man on whom thine eyes shall rest after waking, his scalp shalt thou assuredly take to decorate the poles of thy wigwam, when thou reachest the homes of thy people on the wide prairies of the west ! " Stranger, thine was the first face that my eyes rested on after waking. When morning breaks in the east, then shall I set out on the long journey before me, and thy scalp shall go with me. Wagh !'

I could not keep back the little sigh, half a sigh and half a sob, that burst irrepressibly from my heart as he finished speaking. There could be no doubt now as to the fate in store for me. O bitter, bitter for life's bright dream to end so suddenly in utter darkness ! So young, too ; and ah, so unfitted to die ! I shut my eyes, and my soul seemed to be sinking down through endless depths of night to where no voice could ever comfort me—no friendly hand succour me—to the shadowless realms of death. But, hark ! what was that ? The low, quavering sound of a human voice, weak and uncertain at first, but gathering strength as it went on ; neither very sweet nor very skilful, but full of earnestness, and touched with a solemnity and depth of feeling that appealed directly to the heart. It was the poor deformed landlord of the lonely country inn singing a quaint, old-world psalm, learned probably at the little church among the Fells. Coming at such a time, it brought tears into my eyes, and lifted me out of the depths of that terrible despair, and gave me strength to look my fate more calmly in the face.

Seven o'clock striking by the little cuckoo-clock in the

corner. Where have I been, and what has happened to me ? It was not a dream, then ? Alas ! no, for I am still bound hand and foot to the chest ; but my limbs, where the cords have cut into them, have lost all feeling by this time, and are like the limbs of a dead man. I have been unconscious of my position for the last few minutes, unconscious of everything except some vague, blessed dream of home, the home I shall never see more. Still grim and immovable, hideous as some Indian idol, with his yellow-painted face, Nettlefold sits as before. Another half-hour, and daylight will be here, and then——

This thought was still lingering in my brain, when the American laid down his pipe, stepped on to the floor, and going to one corner of the room, brought from thence some short pieces of cord, which had evidently been cut and laid ready for the purpose for which he now required them. With these he tied my ankles firmly together, and fastened down my arms close to my sides ; then cutting the longer cords which had bound me to the chest, he lifted me up lightly, as though I were a child, and set me upright against the door of a large cupboard which reached from the floor almost to the ceiling, and filled up a recess on one side of the fireplace. Then passing a longer cord across my chest and under my arms, he fastened one end of it to a large hook in the wall, and the other to one of the iron bars that guarded the window. Fixed thus, it was impossible for me to stir ; indeed, had my ankles been free, I could not have walked an inch, so numb and dead were they through having been so tightly bound for so long a time. ‘Truly,’ I thought, ‘my last moment on earth is at hand.’

The American retired a few paces, to contemplate the effect of his handiwork, and something like a gleam of satisfaction lighted up his murderous eyes as he looked at me. He then walked slowly backward till he reached the opposite wall of the room, and drawing out his bowie-knife,

he felt its blade with his finger for a moment, then quickly raising his arm, he flung the knife with deadly aim, straight at me as it seemed. Involuntarily, I shut my eyes, and the same instant the blade whizzed past my left ear, and buried itself in the soft wood of the door a few inches from my neck. I breathed again, and opened my eyes. The American uttered a solemn guttural 'Wagh !' of satisfaction, and drew his tomahawk from his belt. I would not close my eyes this time, but setting my teeth firmly together, kept my glance bent on him, though my heart seemed to stop its beating while I gazed ; and next instant the tomahawk came rushing through the air, and crashed into the cupboard door, a few inches to the right of my throat. Again the American gave utterance to the same singular sign of satisfaction as before. I had scarcely time to wonder at my second escape, before I saw him draw his revolver from his belt, and take a sort of rapid half-aim at me. 'All over with me this time !' I muttered to myself ; but even as the words escaped me, I felt the wind of the bullet among my hair, and knew that I was safe for the third time.

'One !' said the madman gravely, as his arm went up again to the line of fire ; and then the second bullet stirred my hair, and buried itself in the door above my head. 'Two !' said the American sententiously, as he strapped his gaudy rug more closely around him. I now began to comprehend that, in accordance with Indian usage, this was intended as a sort of torture, preliminary to the grand catastrophe. Suppose he were to miss his aim ? I whispered to myself. Why, even in that case, the end of the tragedy would but come a few minutes sooner ; anyhow, he would doubtless tire in a very short time of playing with his victim, and would inflict the final *coup*, and so bring the business to an end.

But bullet number three brought my thoughts to an abrupt conclusion. In this case, I suppose, the shot swerved slightly

from the line it was intended to take, as it came nearer than the previous ones had done, and carried with it a portion of my hair.

‘Three!’ said the American. ‘Bad!’

Shots four, five, six, and seven rapidly followed; by which time my head was hemmed in, as it were, by a circle of bullets. When the last shot had been fired, Nettlefold crossed the room, drew his knife and tomahawk carefully out of the wood, and replaced them in his belt.

‘Circle the first!’ he said, protruding his hideous visage to within an inch of my own. ‘Circle the second will’—— He did not finish his words, but nodded his head at me ominously three times, and then went back to his former place on the other side of the kitchen, and began to reload his revolver.

But hardly had he set about the operation, when both he and I were startled by hearing a low, weird voice outside the door calling him softly by name—a ghostly, passionless voice, without inflection or modulation of tone.

‘Soan-ge-taha,’ said the voice, ‘Soan-ge-tahá, cease what thou art about, and come hither!’

I could see the madman’s face pale under the paint with which it was smeared, and a sudden fear tremble in his eyes. Motionless and rigid as a statue, he stood listening for the voice to come again.

‘Soan-ge-taha,’ repeated the voice, ‘brave son of the red-skins, why dost thou linger? The Great Spirit that visited thee in thy sleep gives thee a sacred hatchet. With it, thou shalt slay many white men. Come forth, and seek it where it has been laid ready to thy hand. Thou shalt find it in a sweet-smelling box of cedar-wood, in the straw-thatched shed close to the house. Soan-ge-taha, come—come—come!’ and with a low wailing sound, the voice seemed to die gradually away in the distance.

It sounded so weird and unearthly in the gray stillness of

early morning, that for my own part, perfectly unable to account for it as I was, I could not help feeling strangely thrilled and moved ; as for the American, he looked like a man stricken by some mortal terror, with big drops of sweat standing on his brow, afraid to stir, and equally afraid to disobey the ghostly summons.

Again was the summons repeated in faint far-away accents : ‘*Soan-ge-taha, come—come—come!*’ The American dared disobey no longer. He laid his empty revolver gently on the floor, tightened the girdle round his waist, felt that his knife and tomahawk were ready to his hand in case of need ; and then unbolting the heavy oak door, with a last scared and trembling, but half-suspicious glance at me, as though suspecting some treachery on my part, he opened the door, and slipped noiselessly out into the gray dawn.

Scarcely had the peacock’s feather which decorated the head of *Soan-ge-taha* disappeared through the door, when, light and agile as an acrobat, the humpbacked landlord swung himself by a pendent rope through the trap-door of the loft to the ground. With a single bound he reached the open door, and in another instant it was shut and bolted against the madman. Not a word did he utter till, with wonderful rapidity, he had seen to the fastenings of every door and window in the house ; then he gave vent to a smothered ‘*Hurrah!*’ and drawing a knife from his pocket, proceeded to cut the cords with which I was bound.

I could hardly believe in the reality of what I saw ; the whole affair was so incomprehensible that, for some moments, I could regard it as nothing more than a wild vagary of my own over-wrought brain. But when I saw the cords fall at my feet, and felt that I was free, the sudden rush of happiness was more than I could bear ; and I remember nothing more till I found myself lying on the carved chest again,

with the landlord's friendly face bent over me while doing his best to bring back my scattered senses.

But the madman was back by this time, conscious that he had been made the victim of some trick ; and the first sound that greeted my returning consciousness was a ferocious yell of mingled rage and despair, which burst from his lips as he flung himself against the stout old door, which quivered visibly under the shock, but refused to give way. Finding his efforts of no avail, he next tried his strength against the windows ; but they were even more impervious to his attacks than the door had been, being grated with iron bars, and further secured inside by stout wooden shutters. Then, in a red-hot fury of raging madness, he tried, one after another, every door and window that opened into the house ; but they had been too well secured by the vigilant landlord to afford any chance of ingress. Baffled at every point, the madman's rage found vent in a series of terrific yells, mingled with curses and threats of direst vengeance against both of us. Then, for a time, everything was still, and we breathed more freely.

'But how did it all happen, Mattinson ?' I said after a time. 'I confess I can't understand it at all. And that mysterious voice, which chilled me to the very marrow, can you explain what that was ?'

'Easily enough, sir. The voice you heard was my voice.' Seeing my stare of astonishment, he went on, with a little laugh : 'You see, sir, this is how it was. When I was a young fellow, I was servant to a well-known conjurer and ventriloquist, and travelled up and down the country with him. After a time, I found out, quite by chance, as I was trying to imitate him one night, that I possessed in quite uncommon perfection the ventriloquial faculty. I practised it a good deal after that entirely for my own amusement, though there were not wanting people who said I might have made my fortune by it had I been so inclined. Be that as

it may, however, I grew heartily sick of that vagabond sort of life after a while ; and as my old woman, whom I was courting at that time, refused to have me unless I would settle down at home again, why, I did what I have never regretted doing—I sacrificed fortune for happiness, and here I am.—Well, sir, when I awoke, some time in the night, up there in the loft, where I was sleeping comfortably enough on a shake-down, I heard some curious noises below, which induced me to get up cautiously, and look through the trap. There I saw you fastened down on the chest, and that rampaging painted devil standing over you, and laughing like some hyena gone mad. With that, I quietly pulled up the ladder, thinking he might perhaps want to serve me the same way next. A minute or two later, you opened your eyes, and you know what happened after that as well as I do ; only you don't perhaps know that after that madman shot at me, I found a little crack in the floor, just over where you lay, through which I could see and hear everything without being seen myself. When he was firing at you in that bloodthirsty way, I was all in a quake of pity and terror, not seeing any way by which I could help you in the least ; for to have ventured out of the loft with no weapon but a little pocket-knife, would have been merely sacrificing my own life without doing you the least good ; when suddenly it flashed across my mind—and it was more like a flash of light from Heaven than anything else—to try the effect of my old powers of ventriloquism, which had indeed grown somewhat rusty for want of use. The thought was not well out of my head before I spoke as you heard ; and words seemed given to me in a wonderful way, of which I had never any experience before, as if something above and beyond me were speaking through my lips. And now he's outside, trying his best to get in again ; but I don't think he'll manage it. Hark ! he's at the window again.'

Nettlefold, in fact, came back at that moment, and again

tried his utmost to effect an entrance both at back and front, breaking the silence every now and then with a true mad-man's yell, more terrible to hear than even a genuine Indian whoop.

After a time, when all was silent again, Mattinson climbed up into the loft, and making a watch-tower of the window in its sloping roof, from that elevated position reported to me the progress of the siege. He had not been long at his post before he reported that the American had just entered the stable, which stood a short distance from the house; a minute or two later, mounted on the bare back of my mare, and with nothing but a halter to guide her, Nettlefold galloped out of the yard, and flinging a parting yell at the house and its inmates, disappeared at a headlong pace down the white road.

We kept within doors all day, thinking that the departure of the American might be merely a ruse to draw us from our retreat. Towards nightfall, a company of a dozen people, among them our landlord's wife and daughter, all came up together from Overbarrow, whom we welcomed to our temporary prison with thankful hearts. The same evening, by the favour of a kindly farmer, who undertook to drive me over, I found myself at Hawthorpe Hall.

Before the following morning, the storm, which had been threatening for several days, came down in earnest, and was remembered as one of the most terrible which had been known in those parts for many years. Six weeks later, when the thaw came on, the bodies of Nettlefold and my mare were found at the foot of a precipice among the hills, over which they had gone headlong in the storm. Papers found among the effects of the American enabled us to communicate with his friends. From what we learned subsequently, it would appear that he had at one time been confined in a private lunatic asylum, but had ultimately been discharged as cured; that his insanity was supposed to

have been occasioned in part from a blow on the head received during a frontier skirmish, and in part from disappointment and wounded self-love, at being jilted by a beautiful Indian girl with whom he had fallen in love during his wanderings. His friends were wealthy, and they took him—sleeping his last sleep—across the Atlantic, to rest in the grave of his fathers. Peace to his memory !

As for Mattinson, he is now, thanks to the generosity of my then prosperous employer, the landlord of the *Rose and Crown*, the largest and best-known inn within twenty miles of Hawthorpe.

By the time Mr Watkins's story was concluded, the morning was far advanced. Nothing could be more wretched than the aspect of the jury-room as the early sun poured in through the ghastly window, making the white walls blush as if for their nakedness. Mooney was, of course, asleep ; Quiverful had forgotten his domestic anxieties in an uneasy slumber ; and Simperton was enjoying broken snatches—homœopathic doses of sleep, from which he every now and then awoke to exclaim ' Bravo ! ' ' Very good ! ' in tribute to the talents of the narrator for the time being. The rest of us were awake, and although far from comfortable, as resolute as ever. We felt that we were right in our intended verdict, but above all we felt that Crasket was wrong. As for the iron-merchant, he was still as obstinate as George III., but it was evident that his constitution was not what he had boasted it to be. His face was pallid, and drawn down in 'gutters like a wasted tallow-candle ; and when he spoke, his voice sounded as hollow and sepulchral as the tones in which the ghosts of Professor Pepper are accustomed to address the shuddering public.

' How many more of these childish stories are we going to have ? ' inquired he.

' Just as many as the foreman thinks proper,' returned

Sunnyside gaily. 'I have written down the heads of some half-dozen narratives myself, and Mr Winkard here, he has been doing the same.'

'As for me,' remarked the supercargo, 'I'm just as choke-full o' nārration as a pumpkin is of seed.'

'Moreover,' said I, 'only five of us have yet favoured the company; and the other seven should be taken in order, as they sit, before our second batch comes on. It is Mr Mooney's turn now, for example, and probably, after his prolonged rest, his intellect will be fresh and vigorous.'

'Stop!' cried Crasket in an awful voice; 'don't wake that man. I wish to say a few words, once for all. I have suffered much—it is useless to conceal it—through this last night, and I am supremely wretched at this moment. No narrative from Mr Mooney—no, nor from even Simperton—could make me much worse. All these stories have been told, I am well aware, to exhaust me, to wear me out: well, I'm not to be exhausted; I'm not to be worn out. Still, as I said before, if a single genuine instance can be brought forward—the scene not being laid in Yucatan—of an honest individual in possession of a stolen five-pound note, and'——

'Bob knows one,' interrupted Mr William Rooster.

'Bill knows one,' echoed Mr Robert.

'I don't want two instances,' returned Mr Crasket viciously; 'one is quite sufficient. If one can be adduced, I say, I will'——

'Well, you'll give in, Mr Crasket; come, that's right and fair enough.'

'No, sir; *I'll eat my hat*,' ejaculated the iron-merchant savagely.

'And he *shall* too,' exclaimed the supercargo with shrill vehemence. 'If that story *is* told, and it don't convince that 'ere Crasket right off, and he don't come into our verdict

pretty slick, I'll be *dodrotted* but he *shall* eat his hat, linin' and all.'

'Under these circumstances,' observed I gravely, 'it is especially necessary that there should be silence for Mr William'——

'No, sir ; Bob, if you please—it's his story,' observed the individual in question.

'No, sir ; it's Bill's,' exclaimed Mr Robert.

'Then silence, gentlemen all, if you please,' said I, 'for

THE MESSRS ROOSTER'S STORY.'

[There was silence for some considerable time, except for a whispered colloquy between the two cousins as to which was to undertake the responsibility of relating their joint narrative ; this was eventually put an end to by the simple intervention of a halfpenny, which coming down 'Tails,' whereas Mr William had cried 'Heads,' that gentleman, without further altercation, commenced as follows :

'Well, gentlemen, the story is not my story, nor yet Bob's after all ; it's our Aunt Sarah's story, and true, as I sit here, from first to last. She has often told it us, and I will tell it to you in her own words, which will be easier to me than in any other way, totally unaccustomed as I am to public—I mean, to literary composition.']

It was not my first situation, but I was in a manner new to service, and only eighteen when I went to live with a family in Kilburn. Their name was Nutley. They were very respectable people—in their ways and doings, I mean : the master was head-clerk in a great City house, and had a pretty fair income ; but the family was large ; there were ten children, the eldest not above my own years, and the youngest quite a baby. So they had to look at a shilling before they spent it. Making ends meet, in a close, genteel

way, was just as much as they could do ; but they did it : every tradesman was regularly paid ; the missis and all the children were plainly but respectably dressed ; there was no penury in the house ; but it was carefully managed : nothing too much allowed, and everything well looked after, from the coal-cellar to the tea-canister. I suppose it was to get a genteel place cheap that brought them out to Kilburn. It's a new neighbourhood yet, but was far newer then : a dozen houses or so scattered along the high-road after one passed the turnpike, with fields and building-ground between them ; every house standing alone, shut in its own garden, and the place near enough to Paddington for the tramps and ill-doers, that were never scarce there, to come out and look about them. There was need for locking of doors and bolting of windows, when the long nights came on, and one did not see a policeman often. But the houses had been built on speculation, they said, for a richer class of people, who did not take them ; and on account of the loneliness—I am speaking of ten years ago, when Kilburn was thought the world's end, in a manner—they let them at uncommon low rents, considering the number of rooms and the garden-ground they had back and front. It was a long way for the master going to the City every morning, and only one omnibus : if he happened to miss it, there was nothing but walking to the Marble Arch in all weathers. But Mrs Nutley liked the place, it was so private and genteel ; and I believe master had taken it through her persuasion.

She was a small thin woman, with a sharp look in her eyes, and rather withered and careworn, considering her time of life, for she was not forty then ; but they said she had been grandly brought up, though without fortune, by a titled lady in the West End, who was her aunt, and would have adopted her, for she was an orphan ; but in becoming Mrs Nutley, she had made a match of her own choosing. The titled lady could not acknowledge the head-clerk, of

course ; and her niece was cast off on his account ; but never forgetting what she had been in her young days, Mrs Nutley's whole endeavour was to keep up a fine appearance, and associate with nobody but the best and grandest she could get at. For the one reason, her house was perfectly kept ; for the other, she had few acquaintances. The children were mostly all girls—I have noticed that always happens in pinched families—three boys out of the ten, and they the youngest. The whole family were like their mother, no great beauties ; and rather thin and pale, in spite of the clear air that blew over their home from Cricklewood and Hampstead Heath. It might have been owing to their strict bringing-up : there was very little play, and no humours allowed in that house. Mrs Nutley's word was law, and to make them genteel, appeared to be her only consideration ; and they were kept mighty close to lessons, partly by herself, partly by masters, old and severe ones, who came to teach music, drawing, French, and I don't know what else, three times a week. They were giving the girls a good education, that they might get their own living ; there was no other prospect before them, you see.

Mr Nutley was out every morning by eight o'clock, and never in till seven in the evening, except on Sundays ; but he liked gentility too, and looked thin and careworn with keeping it up, as the heaviest end of the burden fell on him. He was a tall handsome man, with a fair complexion and dark hair, and might have been a beau among the ladies before he got married, and had ten children, which is enough to make sober-sides of any man. But every child in the house liked him far better than their mother, was glad at his home-coming, and missed him when he happened to stay late at business. We did not wonder at it—I mean, the cook and myself ; that was all the servants they kept, and we had plenty to do, I can tell you. The plain truth was, that missis had master under petticoat government, as the

men call it ; she got the handle of him somehow when they were first married, kept it ever after, and governed house and family, may be on account of her having been niece to a titled lady and seen high company. At anyrate, she had the rule of them all. A strict mistress, I must say, but not a hard one ; and whether it was that I suited her particularly, and did not grumble over stints, as the cook was apt to do, Mrs Nutley took a sort of liking to me as much as she could have, I suppose, for any servant ; used to send me on her special errands to get things cheap in Paddington ; used to trust me with candles about the house after nightfall ; with the shutting up of doors and windows—she always sent the master, however, to see that they were all right at the last minute—used to give me the keys of the cupboards sometimes when she went out, which was not often, except to church, and tell me little family affairs when I was taken into the back-parlour to help in the mending and making for the children, which was mostly done at home.

There was a good deal of that kind to do, as you may suppose ; and as I could sew pretty well, and always made myself tidy in the afternoon, I was many an hour in the room with her, and spoken to quite familiar like, though I hope it did not make me forget my place. The missis was not a lady to let one forget it, however friendly she might be with one. I am sure it was nothing but pure loneliness that made her talk to me, for no lady could have less company in her own house. Her husband was out all day, and came home tired in the evening ; her big girls were busy getting ready to be governesses, and teaching the little ones. They were said to be clever at learning, and I know they spent time enough at it ; but whether it was their strict bringing-up, or their natural backwardness that made them so, they were every one childish and simple in common affairs, and one might as well have talked to a baby as to Miss Charlotte, the eldest daughter. She was quite ready to go out as a

governess, if a situation in a titled family could be got for her. Her mother would hear of nothing less, neither would the young lady, for that matter. Though there was not an ounce of their mother's sense and management among them, the whole seven girls had got her ambition to be fine and grand, and never forgot that their grand-aunt was Lady Dangerfield of Belgrave Square. Anyhow, Mrs Nutley found little company in them ; and I could not help thinking she fretted night and day over the grandeur she had thrown herself out of—that is the way with most people who do the like : it made her withered and careworn before the time, as much as keeping up appearances and making ends meet, and it did more harm to her mind. There was a side-window in the back-parlour ; and out of it one could see through the garden paling all that passed on the high-road without being seen. There Mrs Nutley used to sit in her dark print morning-dress, sewing and darning most of the day, while the master was at business, and the girls at lessons ; and when well-dressed people or carriages went by to the villas owned by rich retired tradesmen, the poor lady looked ready to burst with spite and envy. She never said a word at those times, and I never liked to look at her face, but I saw it often enough for all that, and the more fine dresses and carriages that passed, Mrs Nutley was in the worse humour. It was uncommonly bad one day in the middle of my second quarter, when the neighbours were going off all in their airs, you may be sure, to one of the summer flower-shows at Chiswick. The baby wouldn't go to sleep at its usual hour, so my mistress had it in her lap, and it had got a rattle ; and while missis was looking out with her nose to the pane, to get a better sight, the child ran its rattle right through the glass, and there was a window to be mended. Of course, her gentility could not put up with having it broken, because people could see it over the garden paling. She sent me to Paddington the same evening, where the nearest painter and

glazier lived ; but he knew the Nutley's jobs were small, and happened to be busy at better work. I was put off one day after another with promises that he would come or send his man next morning, but neither of them ever came, and missis could not sit at the broken window.

It had been in that state for a week and more, when one morning, as I was doing the steps and sweeping down the path in the front-garden, a man came to the open gate, walked straight up to me, and said : ' You have got a window to mend here, and I am a travelling glazier.' Nobody would have taken him for one, if they hadn't seen the frail at his back. The man's picture is fixed in my memory ; I would know him among a thousand, partly on account of what happened, and partly from his own remarkable appearance. He was a tall thin man, very straight, and very dark in the complexion ; his hair was mostly gray, but it had been very black ; his face was long and skinny, without a bit of whisker, every hair clean shaved off ; he had a hooked nose, thin flat lips, and such a pair of eyes !—they were the most wonderful thing about him, and the worst-looking too. I never knew what colour they were ; but you have seen the eyes of a cat while she is watching a mouse—well, they looked like that—steady, keen, and cunning, with a kind of bad courage in them. I never saw such eyes before, and I don't want to see them again. He was going to pass me, and walk right into the house, for I stood hesitating about letting him in, though the window did want mending. ' Stop,' says I, ' till I tell the missis ;' and I thought it but right to close the street-door behind me, though it was nearly in his face. Mrs Nutley herself had seen him out of the back-parlour. ' I don't like the looks of the man,' said she ; ' but Johnson is not coming, and I am positively ashamed of this broken pane ; let him mend it ; he can't do any harm, for I shall be sewing here. Tell him to come in, and I will see what he charges.'

I shewed the glazier into the room ; and I heard the missis making a stiff bargain with him in her usual way ; he wanted sixpence more than she was willing to give, but they split the difference at last, and he fell to the glazing. Being about the garden, I thought it right to keep an eye on the man, and partly I couldn't help it, he was so remarkable. I thought he spent a good deal of time about the window too ; but Mrs Nutley sat sewing at the other all the time, and by degrees I noticed that there was more talk between her and the glazier than one could have expected. It was by their movements I knew it, and not by their voices, for they were speaking low. She had not liked the looks of the man, and appeared never to have seen him before ; but when he was done and paid and gone about his business, I saw her looking after him anxious and concerned like ; and when I mentioned his queer looks again, she gave me something very like a lecture against being prejudiced by people's appearances.

The window was mended well enough, and the man seemed to have charged little enough for it ; I heard no reflection on that score, and to this day I can't tell how it was made plain to me ; missis never said the like, but somehow I knew that she would not be displeased to see another window broken, and have the glazier back. He passed the house sometimes, but never looked at it—that man could see without looking, you understand. The cook and myself were set to clean the windows oftener than we used to. Poor soul ! she was rather unlucky with glass ; and had a young man at the time, who was behaving ill to her, that rather confused her mind, which was not very clear at the best, except on cooking business, and kept her from noticing anything particular that might be going on in the house. It also kept me from remarking anything about the glazier to her. Minds confused in that way are not to be trusted ; but though she broke many a pane at other times, and had to pay for

them, the glass escaped under her hands then ; and we would not have had a broken window in the house, if the baby had not put its rattle through the back-parlour one day, just as the glazier was going by. Missis sent me out for him directly ; it was such a lucky chance to get the window mended out of hand. He did not seem very glad of the job ; but in he came, and fell to work. Missis sent away the child, shut the door particularly close, took up her sewing ; and they must have talked there for a good while, for when the pane was in, and I dusting the drawing-room, there was a continual whisper going on in the back-parlour. You see the partition was only lath and plaster, and I am not sure there were not chinks in it under the paper. There is no use in saying I didn't try to listen—very few would not under the circumstances—but not a word could I catch, only the constant whisper going on between them ; and I noticed, what doesn't generally happen, that the man spoke the most. What on earth could Mrs Nutley have to say in that confidential manner to the travelling glazier, whose first looks she didn't like, as nobody in their right senses could ? She was a very proper woman, and he no beauty, or, goodness knows, I would have had a bad notion of them. While I was wondering what it would be, and dusting the window-frame, I heard the outer door quietly closed behind somebody, and there was the glazier walking away from the house in no great hurry, and laughing to himself in a kind of wicked scorn.

After that we had no want of broken windows—the baby put its rattle, the little boys their books, and the young ladies their elbows through them, all by accident of course ; but such smashing of glass was never known before ; and what astonished me more, there was no scolding for it. When the windows were broken, they had to be mended ; and Mrs Nutley found there was no use in sending to Johnson in Paddington ; he would never come when he was wanted ;

but the travelling glazier was always passing that way, always brought in, always set to work ; and whether it was up stairs or down, Mrs Nutley had always to be there with her sewing, and it was an understood matter that the door should be fast shut, and nobody allowed to enter the room. Busy as they were with their lessons, and heedless of everything else, the young ladies looked after that ; and I noticed that while the glazier stayed, there was always one of them on the watch, ready to speak for mamma, and keep us servants out of hearing. There were other doings in the house that puzzled me and amazed the cook, if anything, except her young man, could do it. We had been accustomed to nothing but genteel economy—plain cheap living ; every penny counted, and nothing expensive thought on ; but that was all over. By such slow degrees, that I can't say when it began, poultry, game, and all manner of good things, as sure as they came in season, were bought, and that at the best prices. Mrs Nutley appeared to grudge nothing for the table ; they had salmon at two-and-sixpence a pound ; turtle-soup, and vegetables forced in hot-beds. The money did not go in that direction only : from the eldest to the youngest, every one of the family got new dresses, fine fashionable things bought in Regent Street ; such bonnets as the young ladies had direct from Paris, and quite overtopping all the neighbours Mrs Nutley used to look out at ! By the bye, she sat no more sewing in the back-parlour, but always up in the drawing-room, dressed in style, and reading novels, or taking the young ladies out for walks or drives, for they had a carriage engaged to come to their door every afternoon. I'll never forget the pride and glory of the whole lot when it first came, and four of them got into it. But the thing became common. They drove round Rotten Row and Hyde Park ; they went to visit their friends, and I suppose astonished them ; they went to the theatres, to the opera, to the flower-shows—in short, to all places of amusement, and

never stinted or grumbled over what it cost them. I couldn't help thinking that somebody had died, and left them a surprising legacy ; but in the midst of all the gay doings, Mr Nutley still went regularly to business, still came home as late, and was manifestly nothing but the head-clerk he had always been. Mrs Nutley said nothing to account for the wonderful outlay, but she conversed very little with me now. We were not on the old friendly terms, though I had done nothing to displease her, and she found no fault with me. There was no sewing together in the back-parlour, missis being above that ; and you can't imagine how high and grand she had grown in her airs and ways of talking. All the young ladies followed her example ; but the grandeur and the extravagance did not make the house a bit more comfortable ; it was a great deal less so. Between the eternal cooking, dressing, and going out, things went at sixes and sevens from morning till night. We had late sittings-up for them to get home from the theatres, late breakfasts next morning, hot lunches, troublesome dinners, kept till Mr Nutley came back. He got into the habit of bringing men—gentlemen I ought to say, though some of them looked queer, and wore uncommon pins and chains. They had the habit of sitting to all hours, playing cards, and drinking no end of brandy-and-water. It was terrible work. But all the unpleasantness was not in the kitchen. The family used to agree well when they had plain clothes, plain living, and one theatre-going at the Christmas-time ; but now, there were everlasting disputes among them. Every one wanted something they could not or shouldn't have. Miss Charlotte thought her younger sisters too forward ; they found out that she was jealous of them ; there was always a quarrel when they got home from any place of amusement, or after the men with the rings and chains went away. Mrs Nutley's temper wasn't a bit improved, though she could now be as grand as the best of her neighbours. She could not get

people of sufficient standing to visit or invite them, though she made some amazing parties : the best of her company sent apologies ; they were asked without being well enough acquainted, you see. And the men Mr Nutley brought home drank so much, made such a noise, and broke so many glass and china things, that the people engaged from the pastrycook's called them a rum lot, and said there was nothing like high-life below stairs. The disagreeables did not end there. Mr and Mrs Nutley disputed as well as their children ; I don't know whether it was about the men, the money, or the eternal going out, which he never relished, but quarrel and scold they did, late and early, before the family and between themselves ; and I often overheard her saying, that the money all came through her, and she had a right to enjoy it.

You'll understand that about six months had gone in this fashion ; I had made up my mind to look for another situation ; I am not fond of changing ; but between the work, and the unpleasantness, and the odd unaccountable ways their money came and went, I thought an honest girl might be better in a quieter house ; and, to tell you the truth, I was looking about for a decent excuse to give warning—a civil one, if I could find it—for missis had a twelvemonth's character to give. I had a right to a good one, though I say it myself ; but ladies can say many a thing they wouldn't like to write when a servant is inquired after ; and more than that, they owed me wages for the last two quarters. You'll think it curious, and so did I—though the case is not uncommon—that for all the money they spent, their tradesmen were not half so regularly paid as in the careful managing time, and the missis never had a penny when an account came in. So I was casting about how to get my wages and myself off quietly, and intended to speak to Mrs Martin, a very honest respectable charwoman, though Irish, who had washed and scrubbed in all quarters of

London from the time she left her good housemaid's situation to marry a cabman, who turned out no comfort, and ran away to Australia. Being acquainted in a great many good houses, she was likely to know of a situation that might suit me ; and just at that time she came to help us in clearing up after one of the parties. It was a spring morning ; Mrs Martin was scouring out the front area, when the glazier happened to pass, and I was sent to tell him he was wanted at the drawing-room window. As he went in, I came back to help her ; but the look of Mrs Martin's face made me wonder what had happened. 'Does *he* come here often ?' said she, speaking low and frightened like.

'The glazier ?' said I. 'He is always here mending windows, the children break them so often. He is an odd-looking man. Do you know anything of him ?' I knew Mrs Martin would speak the truth, and I would have gone miles to know what he and the missis had in hand.

'Well, all I know is, that any house would be better with broken windows than with his coming to mend them,' said the charwoman. 'What he is, or what he does besides glazing, I can't tell ; but I have known him come to half-a-dozen houses, and never one of them that something strange and bad didn't happen. There was the Littles in Kensington, very respectable people, though rather pinched, till he began to mend their windows ; then they got money, nobody knew how, but they got it, and spent it in all manner of finery ; never had a day's comfort or quiet in the house, their own servants told me ; never paid a tradesman ; at last made a moonlight flitting one night, at the Michaelmas time ; and I heard the police were looking for the master.— There were the Uptons at Stoke-Newington, respectable people, too, and not so poor, but a great deal more saving. They were a bachelor brother and three old maids, you understand. That man came to mend their windows, and they were ever after on the watch, as if for fear to be robbed ;

one of them wouldn't go out alone, nor the servant open the door after nightfall without all sorts of particularity ; and when they had gone on that way for twelve months or so, one of them lost her senses, and the rest took her away, they said, to an asylum ; but they never came back ; the landlord and the tax-collector seized their furniture ; and I heard the police were looking for the brother too.—There were the Welbies out at Brixton, young, new-married people, with little to begin on. He was in a lawyer's office ; she did millinery in a private genteel way for a shop in Oxford Street ; and they lived quiet and comfortable till the glazier came about them. After that, there was nothing but play-going and company-keeping—bad company, I suppose, for the missis got talked about ; and the master had to flee the country for embezzlement—that's the newspaper word for taking his employer's money.—It would take me a summer day to tell you of the people I have known him visit for no good, all respectable, and living in quiet places, just like this.'

'What is his name, and where did he come from ?' said I.

'I never heard any name for him but the Glazier. I don't know where he came from : goodness be about us, I don't want to know !' said the Irishwoman, crossing herself ; 'but my grandmother, who was a mighty wise woman, and lived in the County Limerick, used to say that if people were willing to sell their souls, there was one who could come in any shape to buy them.—Sarah, if you take my advice, you'll leave this place ; no good will come to it since he has got in.'

I thought her superstitious ; but her news made me the more willing to leave the Nutleys ; and as Mrs Martin knew a respectable family in Bayswater who wanted a housemaid, we agreed that she should speak for me, and I should give warning on the following Monday, because that day completed my twelvemonth's service. The charwoman wanted me to say my mother was ill in the country, or something of

that sort, for a civil excuse. 'But no,' said I; 'truth's a diamond of the foremost water; I'll just say the work is too hard for me, as it is for any Christian, and you'll try to get me the place in Bayswater.' I had need of some apology when Monday came and I gave the warning. Missis looked first as if something had frightened her; then, recovering herself, for she was a woman of great spirit, looked me hard in the face, and said: 'Sarah, why do you wish to leave us? Is it higher wages you want?'

We were quite alone in the drawing-room, and a kind of tremor came over me at her hard look and keen question. But I kept composed, and said: 'No, ma'am; but the work of the house is too hard for me, there is so much company; but I'll warrant you'll find a servant able and willing to do it.'

'We all like you, Sarah,' said she, growing very kind. 'I would raise your wages, if that were any object, and, by the bye, you have not been paid for the last two quarters. I can't just settle it now, but here is a five-pound note,' and she pulled one out of her pocket; 'you may want some things, but you must not think of leaving us.'

'I do want some things, thank you, ma'am,' said I, taking the money—it was well to get so much of my own anyhow—'but if you please, I must think of going; the work is too hard, and I would rather have a quieter place.'

'Well, I'll endeavour to suit myself, and I hope you won't repent it, Sarah,' said Mrs Nutley in her own sharp way.

'I hope not, ma'am,' says I; and down-stairs I went, glad enough that the job was done, and there was only the month of notice to put in with the Nutleys. In the meantime, the things missis had spoken of were wanted, now that the money was at last in my fingers; and I think it was on the next Friday—always an unlucky day that—I got time to go down to Anderson's shop in the Edgeware Road; it's there yet—a very good place for prints and common calicoes.

I bought what I happened to want; it came to nearly thirty shillings, and they took it out of the note, and gave me change. I must tell you, missis had dealt at that shop before she got so grand, and could buy nowhere but in Regent Street; they were very obliging to her, and I had often got notes changed by them on her account. Of course, I thought things were as right as usual this time, and went home quite satisfied with the prints and calicoes I had bought. The same evening, Mrs Martin came to tell me that she had spoken of me to the Bayswater people, and I might apply on Monday forenoon, when the missis would be sure to be at home. I got my work done early, and got leave when Monday came, Mrs Nutley never asking where I was going, and not seeming to care; they had every one thrown me overboard in a manner since I gave warning; but off I went in full blow to get the place, Mrs Martin said it was such a good one. I was thinking of nothing but that as I went along, when, just at a place where I used to see the glazier coming, forward walks a policeman, the only one I knew about Kilburn, and though he hadn't just paid me attentions, we were a sort of acquaintances, and used to pass civil remarks when we happened to meet.

'I am very sorry, Sarah,' said he, coming right up, 'but I must do my duty. You are the last young woman I would have expected the like to happen to. I was going to the house for you; but since you are here, it is the quietest way. You must come with me, and I'll return and break it to the family.'

'What has happened to me? and what are you going to break?' said I, wondering if he had gone mad, and there was I on that lonely road with him.

'There is no use in denying it; I have got a warrant for you,' said the policeman, pulling out his paper. 'You are charged with being the accomplice of a gang of forgers: our inspector has been looking after them for some time; but

you are the first we have caught ; and if you take a friend's advice, Sarah, you will just tell all you know about it. They have worked so deep, and escaped so long, that the authorities will let you off easy for your information, and of course you'll repent,' says he, laying his hand on my shoulder.

'A gang of forgers, and my information !' said I ; 'there must be some mistake, Mr Bidens.'

'No mistake at all,' said he. 'You got a note changed at Anderson's in the Edgeware Road on Friday last ; it was known at the bank to be a forgery ; a good many more of the same kind have come through your hands ; in short, we know you to be an accomplice of the gang. You must come along to the police station.'

I went quietly with him—there was no use in anything else ; but they did not keep me long at the office, for the magistrate was sitting, and I was taken before him at once. He asked me all about the note I had changed, and I told him. They shewed it to me, and I knew it instantly by a little mark in the corner. Of course, it was thought I knew more than that, and I was remanded ; but Bidens—I must say he was friendly enough—came to encourage me in the station, saying they had got a clue that would bring the guilty parties to justice, and clear my character from all suspicion. The way he broke the news to the Nutleys, however, was taking the master and missis into custody that afternoon : the one at his place of business, and the other in her carriage, with three of the young ladies ; but the warrant carried them as it did me to the police station, where, I am thankful to say, we were locked up separately. They were brought before the magistrate next morning ; and the master confessed that he had been bribed and bought over to furnish specimens of his employer's handwriting, and that of the heads of other great houses, bankers and merchants, who corresponded with him, to an agent of the gang, by which it was believed their signatures had been forged to

many cheques and bills. I need scarcely tell you that the agent was the glazier ; he took the specimens, and he paid for them, but always in bank-notes, which were every one found to be forgeries too. How the Nutleys had escaped so long passing and changing them always appeared to me like a miracle, and the best of it was, they did not know what they were doing, but thought them good bank-paper. Well, to make a long story short, as I don't understand the round-about ways of the law, a good many of the forgers were caught through the master's confession, and some of them were the men with the pins and chains ; rogues and rascals in every way, as such folks commonly are. They were all transported for different terms. The Nutleys got off easier on account of turning Queen's evidence ; and there was no substantial charge against missis, though I am sure it was she that began the game. Anyhow, the husband got six months' imprisonment, lost his situation, lost his character ; and where the family went to avoid their tradesmen, I don't know, but their furniture was seized and sold, just as Mrs Martin had told me about the other families frequented by the glazier. They never caught him, though he was looked for far and near, and known to have been engaged in a hundred bad doings besides, always in the way of persuading and buying up people. Many a time the saying of Mrs Martin's grandmother has come to my mind when I happened to think of him, and I wish it had been a policeman that was in my place about one year after. I had got discharged without a stain on my character, had got the Bayswater situation, and was comfortable in it, when one day going over the fields with the nurse and the five children to Kensal Green Cemetery, where their father was laid, I saw, in the quietest part of our way, a man sitting on the stile before us. He had no frail or glass at his back then, but was dressed like a Catholic priest, as near as I can say. I could not mistake him, however, and he did not mistake me, for the

moment I came in sight, up he got, and off towards London, passing me with a sort of wicked smile ; and, thank Providence, that was the last I ever saw of the Travelling Glazier.

‘And do you mean to say, sir,’ observed Mr Robert Rooster, addressing himself, directly his cousin had finished his narrative, to Mr Crasket, ‘that our aunt Sarah was anything to blame in the matter, although she *had* got a five-pound note in her possession, which very nearly brought her into trouble ?’

‘No sir,’ said Mr Crasket graciously ; ‘I must say that she was entirely innocent ; and I will add, that there is certainly some species of similarity between her case and that of Frederic Upton’s.’

The iron-merchant spoke with tolerable firmness, but I perceived that his eye wandered in the direction of the supercargo, whose glance, in his turn, was riveted upon Mr Crasket’s hat.

‘Come,’ said I, ‘this is well, Mr Crasket. Let us wake our three friends, and having agreed upon our verdict, come into court—for it is nine o’clock, and the judge will be here immediately—with our *Not Guilty*.’

The iron-merchant still hesitated.

‘It has a very broad, stiff brim,’ remarked the supercargo reflectively.

‘I think, upon the whole, I shall not be justified in holding out longer,’ observed Mr Crasket rising.

He looked as battered and demolished as Fort Sumter after the ten thousand attentions of the ironclads ; nor had he succumbed until after sixteen hours of story-shelling.

While the iron-merchant was yet speaking, a tremendous cheer rang round the court-house, and was repeated again and again.

‘They are cheering the judges,’ said I ; ‘I feel as if I could cheer them myself. Come, let us go in.’

THE VERDICT.

The about-to-be-enfranchised eleven obeyed me cheerfully, and we trooped in all together, and took our places in the hateful Box. The counsel for the defence was speaking as we entered; and the judge replied: 'I am very sorry, Brother Silkins, but it cannot be helped; the case is closed, and the jury have come to their decision.'

The eyes of the vast assemblage were turned towards us with an interest much more intense than I had expected; they had been before as demonstrative in the prisoner's favour as they had dared to be, but it was clear that something had occurred in our absence to increase tenfold the popular desire for an acquittal.

Upton was standing in the dock, no longer passive and unmoved, but with a flushed and joyful face, as though he confidently expected to be released from his degrading position. Close to the dock stood Mary Underedge, bathed in tears, but still with an expression of serenity and satisfaction quite different from that which she had worn on the previous day, when conveyed half fainting from the witness-box. By her side, and with her hand clasped in his, as if to reassure her, stood a young gentleman whom I had not seen before. The only troubled countenance was that of Richard Underedge, Mary's father; I saw him plainly, for, crowded as the place was, the people had withdrawn from him a little, such was their animosity against him, so that he stood alone; but even he looked confident, and saddened rather by some sorrow which had passed away, than with the shadow of impending calamity. It was evident that an acquittal was looked for everywhere—except by the judge upon the bench. He seemed to me to regard us with particular seriousness and gravity, as though we were but too likely to have come to an erroneous decision.

'Are you all agreed upon your verdict?'

‘We are,’ replied I firmly, but not daring to look at Crasket, for fear he should make some cantankerous opposition even at the very last.

‘Is the prisoner at the bar “Guilty” or “Not Guilty?”

The silence was so deep that I heard a bluebottle fly buzzing in the glass cupola of the court-house.

‘Not Guilty,’ returned I.

An uproarious cheer burst forth from the vast assemblage, and continued loud and long, in spite of the efforts of the ushers; and being carried along the passages and the courts without, themselves crowded with people, was taken up by the multitude in the street, who were unable to obtain admittance.

‘My lud, may it please your ludship,’ observed Serjeant Silkins, as soon as silence was restored, ‘now that the jury have arrived at their decision, there can be no possible objection why the evidence of Mr Francis Morris’——

‘We can now receive no *evidence*, Brother Silkins, as you are well aware,’ interrupted the judge smiling; ‘but any statement which may render the innocence of your client more clear, than even the verdict to which we have just listened has done, may certainly, in the interests of justice, be made. If Mr Francis Morris can explain Upton’s possession of the note in question, he will even yet not have arrived in this court too late, since the accused will leave the dock not only free, as now, but without the slightest imputation upon his character.’

A handsome young fellow, bronzed and travel-stained, the same whom I had seen by the side of Mary Underedge, at once entered the witness-box. ‘I can explain this unfortunate matter, my lord,’ said he, ‘in a very few words. It is perfectly true that the note in question was paid by me upon my father’s account to Richard Underedge; and that he entered its number, as well as those of several others, in his memorandum-book at the time. Upon his leaving the room,

however—as he will remember to have done—for the purpose of getting a receipt-stamp, I substituted five sovereigns for that note, but omitted—very carelessly, I own—to mention that I had done so. The reason for the substitution was this : I owed Frederic Upton the exact sum in question ; and as he happened to be from home on some business of his master which would detain him some days, and as I myself was starting for America the next morning, it was more convenient to leave him a five-pound note in an envelope, than the gold.’

‘Then why did not the accused person at once explain from whom, and in what manner, he had received this note?’ inquired the judge. ‘What was the reason of your unfortunate and stubborn silence, Frederic Upton?’

But Frederic Upton had left the dock immediately after the verdict which set him free, nor in spite of the very energetic efforts of the ushers, did he again make his appearance in the court-house of Dimblebury.

Years after the above trial, this ex-Foreman, being given to the fine arts, was enticed into an exhibition of paintings in Piccadilly, advertised as Scenes from the Far West. They were not good ; but while I was investigating one of them rather narrowly, a hand was lightly laid upon my shoulder, and, behold, a charming young woman was courtesying to me in a very pleasant fashion, while a young man, upon whose arm she rested, was pulling at a piece of hair upon his forehead, in token of grateful amity.

‘You are Mary Underedge, are you not, my good girl?’ said I.

‘No, sir ; I am Mary Upton ; and this is my husband, Frederic, who has so much to thank you for in the matter of that trial at Dimblebury. Mr Sunnyside told us—when we went to be photographed together—that, but for you, that dreadful Mr Crasket would have sent dear Fred to prison.’

‘I am glad he did not,’ said I. ‘But do you know that your dear Fred almost deserved to go for not revealing what he knew about that five-pound note. Why, on earth, did he not tell all about it?’

‘Because, sir,’ answered the young wife proudly, ‘he had promised that he never would. Mr Francis Morris did not want to be brought up to be a lawyer like his father, but to be a painter instead, and he used to paint a great deal upon the sly. Whenever he finished a picture, he liked to have a pretty frame for it, and he employed my husband to carve it for him. “Only,” said he, “never you mention to any human being that you do these things for me. If my father came to know of it at present, he would be exceedingly angry. Some day or another, when I shall have made a great success, it will be different, and he will be proud enough of his son the painter.” And that is why my husband would not clear himself at the trial. It was very hard upon him, sir, was it not? But I will say Mr Francis has done all he can to make it up to us since. These are all pictures painted from sketches taken in that very tour of his in America.’

‘Then your patron is famous now, and his father lets him follow his chosen calling, does he?’

‘Well, sir, the fact is, Mr Morris the elder is dead.’

‘Ah, then, the young man does as he likes, of course. But these paintings of his *are* very beautiful, Mrs Upton, are they not?’

‘I daresay they may be, sir; I am sure I hope they are, for Mr Francis’ sake; but oh, sir, did you ever see anything so lovely as my dear Frederic’s *frames*?’

POSTSCRIPT.

It will scarcely be expected—notwithstanding what *is* expected of a British juryman—that this ex-Foreman should narrate the histories of his eleven companions subsequent to their escape from the Box at Dimblebury. Let it be

imagined (with the exception, we will hope, of Crasket) that 'they all lived very happily afterwards,' which, by comparison with their existence in the jury-room, it is very probable they did. I am not in a position to say more, for, to tell the truth, we have rather shunned each other's company since the occasion in question. There are some who consider Solitary Confinement to be the severest of punishments; these have never tried the effect of Enforced Companionship. However, no man need ever be a jurymen again; the recipe for this exemption has just been confided to me by Mr Sunnyside; in the strictest confidence, it is true, but I shall do my duty to the public at all hazards. I print the gentleman's letter *in extenso*.

‘*Private.*

‘DEAR MR EX-FOREMAN—Knowing how deeply you feel upon the question of service in the jury-box, I write these few lines to let you know how it may be avoided for your whole lifetime. No sooner had I removed to town—where you will be glad to hear I am doing a very good business, principally in heads and shoulders [*vignettes* ?]—than I found myself summoned to serve upon an Old Bailey jury. This was bad enough of itself; but since Crasket now resides at his London establishment, there was just a possibility that I might meet *him* again, under similar circumstances. This, of course, was not to be endured. I therefore applied to Mr Ferret, of Skinner Street, Snowhill—a locality singularly consonant with his character—for redress under this grievance.

“Don’t want to serve this session, eh?” quoth this very sharp practitioner. “Very natural, very right: then you shall not serve.”

“But I shall be fined twenty pounds,” said I, “shall I not?”

“Twenty fiddle-sticks!” responded Ferret. “Give me five pounds down, and I will engage that you shall never be called upon to serve again as long as you live.”

‘ I instantly gave him the money.

‘ As the time drew on for the sessions, however, I began to feel certain qualms of conscience ; and becoming rather curious to see what measures would be taken for my exemption, I attended at the Old Bailey on the appointed day, concealing myself very completely, however, in a dark corner of the court. The names of the jurors were soon commenced with ; and I experienced very unpleasant emotions, when ‘ Henry Sunnyside, Camera Villas, Kentish Town,’ was called out in a very impressive voice, and a pause ensued. The call was repeated ; and then a man who actually stood next to me, stepped forward, and addressed the court. I thought he was about to denounce me, there and then, although, indeed, it turned out that he knew me no more than I knew him. He was a very respectable-looking person, in deep black, with the air of one who was suffering under some recent heavy affliction.

“ Mr Sunnyside is unable to attend, sir,” observed he in a tone broken by emotion.

“ Why not ? ” asked the official sharply. “ What is his excuse ? ”

“ He is dead, sir,” responded my unknown friend with a half sob.

“ Poor fellow. Scratch him out then,” was the humane reply.

‘ The shock that this caused to me at the time, my dear ex-Foreman, was rather severe ; but it will be nothing, of course, to one who knows what is coming. *Verbum sap.—*
Yours ever,

HARRY SUNNYSIDE.’



A MISTAKE, AND ITS RESULTS.

IT seems a long time ago since the journey from Cork to Dublin took two days. There are those living, I suppose, who remember when it was a matter of three or four, but I speak of a more modern period, albeit the railway from Dublin to Kingstown was then the only one in Ireland. At this time, Bianconi's large four-horse cars formed the grand trunk from the south to the metropolis; while smaller vehicles, meeting the principal conveyance at different points, acted as branch-lines to the main one. From one of these latter I took the large car at Mitchelstown, on an intensely cold day, the last or last but one of October 18—. I was going to Dublin for my Michaelmas Term examinations in Trinity College; and having idled the whole summer, I felt some apprehension about the result of the ordeal through which I had to pass, and wondered much whether I should come back 'plucked.' The dark leaden sky, and the cutting north-east wind, were in dreary keeping with the sombre thoughts that troubled me. I occupied the box-seat, an honour that was dearly purchased by facing the blast; and Stapleton the driver predicted snow (early in the season as it was) before we reached Kilkenny, our destination for that night. We delayed for half an hour, I remember, at Clon-

mel about two o'clock ; there was a good deal of excitement in the town, from the expectation of a special commission for the trial of prisoners connected with two terrible agrarian murders of recent occurrence in the South Riding of Tipperary. As we journeyed on, the driver entertained me with details of different outrages that he knew of, pointing out, now and again, the scenes where they took place, and winding up with the ominous announcement : ' Mark my words for it, but the Ribbon boys will give them enough to do this winter ; they won't let much grass grow under the peelers' feet anyways.'

I forget now how many stages we had travelled from Clonmel when we stopped to change horses at a small public-house on the roadside ; something was amiss with the shoe of one of the horses, and a sharp altercation ensued between the driver and the stable-boy on the subject, that ended with an injunction to ' hurry off like blazes ' to a neighbouring forge for the smith to remedy the defect. As I foresaw that there would be some delay, I proposed to one or two of my travelling companions to join me in a run to warm our feet until the car overtook us. As they declined, I set off alone, calling back to Stapleton, when I was a few paces on, to know if there were any turns upon the road.

' No, sir,' he replied ; and then added : ' keep to the left—keep to the left, and you'll be all right.'

Laughing at this unintentional pun, and repeating the old couplet to myself :

If you go to the left, you'll be sure to go right ;
If you go to the right, you'll go wrong—

I dashed on at full speed, and very soon noticing a road that branched off at right angles to the main one, I concluded that this was the reason of his direction. I was at all times a very swift runner, while the intense cold of the evening braced my energies still more. ' By Jove ! ' I exclaimed, ' I'll astonish them a bit : old Jehu will think I'm lost

before he picks me up ;' and the expectation of gaining credit by my prowess as a walker, accelerated my speed to unusual rapidity. The day, I have already remarked, was specially gloomy, and the evening shadows were now darkening into night with more than ordinary swiftness. Once I was for a moment at fault about the road, as I came upon a slight divergence from the direct line, but recalling Stapleton's words—'keep to the left'—I followed that direction, and trudged on upon this unknown way into the thickly-gathering darkness. At last I began to wonder why the car did not come up ; but concluding that the smith's operations caused the delay, I still went forward until the road became unusually rough and broken ; and then, as far as the dim light allowed, I observed that the vegetation at the sides encroached far more than I had ever known upon a mail-coach road. 'Oh, 'tis impossible that I can have gone astray !' I exclaimed, not allowing the unpleasant thought to intrude ; and I still continued my course, though at a more doubtful pace, until I suddenly halted on perceiving that the narrowing line of roadway appeared to cease altogether, and I found myself actually walking on moist boggy ground. 'Where on earth am I ?' I cried in consternation, peering round through the darkness. As far as I could descry, I seemed to have wandered into some moor or commonage that stretched along the base of a steep acclivity ; not a sound could I hear on any side, but the moaning sigh of the wind as it swept by with penetrating bitterness, and once the wild cry of some bird, startled from its rest by my approach. I made two or three efforts to retrace my steps, but they proved ineffectual ; and each time I became more bewildered, stumbling over rocky projections or roots of trees, and occasionally sinking ankle-deep into wet miry ground. 'God help me !' I exclaimed at last in utter despair, and almost bursting into tears of vexation. 'I'll have to wander about here all night, and perish with cold before morning.'

Another desperate effort to reach some pathway met with a like issue, save that by, I suppose, some consequent change of position, a bright light suddenly broke upon me, so bright and so close, that I was considerably startled at the unexpected appearance.

I thought of the Will-o'-the-wisp, and fancied, from the evident nature of the ground, that it might be the meteor of the marsh ; but as I moved cautiously forward, I saw that it came through the open door of a cabin, and a closer access shewed me why I had not sooner detected it. The tenement before me was curiously constructed ; the ground on three sides rose at a considerable elevation, and it seemed as if a deep cavernous recess had been formed in the yielding soil, and in it this rude habitation erected. I walked straight to the door, but saw no one within or immediately near the cabin ; the light came from a large peat-fire, piled upon a hearthstone at one side of the room ; and so bright was the illumination, that it not only disclosed every object inside, but enabled me to notice distinctly the nature and peculiarity of the building without. I hesitated to enter, notwithstanding the tempting look of the fire, where there was no one to invite me. I called loudly once or twice, but no reply came ; and at length I passed within the doorway, and proceeded without ceremony to warm my chilled limbs at the welcome blaze. 'Some one is sure to be here in two or three minutes,' I thought ; 'this fire has been freshly made up.' The room where I stood seemed to be the only one the place could boast of, and wretched enough it was : an old bedstead, with a tattered curtain, occupied one corner ; beside the fire rose a huge pile of dried sticks flung loosely together, that nearly reached to the ceiling ; a large log of timber against the wall at the side opposite the fire, formed a kind of rude seat ; while a stool or two, and an old rickety table, made up the remainder of the furniture. When some short time elapsed, I began to feel a little nervous at the position in which I

found myself; apart from the vexation I experienced at having gone astray, and the difficulty I might find in reaching Dublin in time for my college duties, I remembered the troubled state of the country; and this lonely spot, at the foot of some mountain, was no desirable place to be caught in at night, alone and unarmed.

I was deliberating whether I had better make another attempt to find my way, or stay until some one came, when the dead silence was broken by the noise of evidently more than one person approaching. As the parties came nearer, I could discern that some conflict or struggle was going on; at first, there were no voices, but a peculiar panting sound, such as accompanies the movement of people where effort is met by resistance, until at length, in a low, deep voice, like the growl of a mastiff, the words reached me: 'Curse you, will you come on? I'll knock you on the head, if you don't.' The ominous tone in which this brief sentence was uttered, evidently close to the doorway, made me bound back from the glare of the fire, and without a moment's thought, I glided in behind the pile of brushwood before referred to, between which and the end-wall of the cabin a narrow passage afforded bare space for concealment. I had scarcely effected my purpose, when three men entered the apartment, or rather two dragged in another between them. 'Shut the door, Bill,' gasped the elder of the two, for he was out of breath, and perspiring profusely. The younger man, addressed as Bill complied, and then drew a large iron bar across the closed entrance. The screen behind which I was ensconced was so loosely constructed that I could see through the interstices all that went forward, while I devoutly hoped that it would prove sufficient to hide me from observation. The third individual of the party, who seemed to have been brought in as a prisoner, was a mere stripling, did not look more than twenty, and had, I could notice by the firelight, an expression of extreme alarm on his pale young face as he

looked upon his captors. 'There!' cried the elder man, giving him a violent push backwards, and shaking his closed fist at him, 'you are cocht at last, you miserable spalpeen, you! I had my eye upon you when you little thought it. I suspected you even the very night you took the oath; and to-night I tracked you down to the police barrack, and saw what you were afther; but as there's a heaven above us, it's the last chance you'll ever get of doing the like!'

'I tell you, Barney, on my solemn oath,' began the young man in a voice that trembled with agitation; but before he could utter another word, a quick, sharp knocking at the door interrupted him, and seemed to startle the whole party. The two men looked inquiringly at each other for a moment. 'Oh!' exclaimed the younger, who had been addressed as Bill, 'tis Gran, I suppose;' and walking forward, he admitted, after a moment's parley, an old gray-haired woman, with a cloak thrown over her head. 'An' where were you now, at this hour of the evening?' asked Barney, accompanying the inquiry with an oath.

'An' where was I, is that it? Afther them divils of goats there, that were wandhering off a good two mile and more from here; and near enough I was, bad-luck to them! tumbling in the dark into the Wizard's Hole above there in the bog; and 'tis a night, glory be to God! that would shiver the heart out iv your body.—But what's along here?' asked the old woman suddenly. 'What's the matther? Isn't this Ned Sweeny?'

'Matther enough!' returned Barney gruffly. 'He only wanted to get the rope round my neck and Bill's here; he was turnin' informer on our hands; but never you fear; we'll stop that work. Here, Bill, lend a hand, will you,' and the speaker strode across the room with some strong cord in his hand, that he had drawn from his pocket. The poor youth uttered a wild cry of terror that rung through the whole place, as the two men seized him.

‘I tell you, Barney,’ he cried imploringly, ‘I wasn’t going to tell a word to mortal soul ; all I wanted with Connors was to ask him about the rabbits down at the colonel’s.’

‘Whisht your jabber, you thin-skinned varmint, you. Keep your breath to cool your porridge. I wouldn’t believe ye, if ye kissed all the books in the barony. Ye’d have told that same foxy cub of a peeler of our tramp to-night, if I didn’t stop your tongue. Them was the rabbits at the colonel’s ye were afther. Ha ! you’ll never see daylight again, plase Providence. Here, Bill, tie that knot tight, will ye.’

I could see from the spot where I was sheltered, that after a brief and feeble struggle, their unfortunate victim had been bound hand and foot, and was then left sitting upon the log of timber before mentioned. I was at first so absorbed in interest at what I witnessed, as to be half unconscious of my own peril, but a terrible sense of it soon recurred. That I had most unfortunately fallen upon a party of desperate ruffians, there was no doubt, nor could I entertain a hope of escaping speedy death, if I were detected, and that might be expected every moment. A cold shudder crept through my whole frame as I realised the horrible position I was in. I was afraid, too, to stir, as an unguarded movement might so disturb the frail screen in front as at once to betray me ; and the narrow passage between it and the wall scarcely afforded standing room. Bitterly did I curse the mad stupidity that led me into such danger ; nor did many minutes elapse before a fresh accession of alarm was caused by the anticipation of instant discovery. Barney and Bill, as I heard them named, after binding their prisoner, returned to the fire, where the old woman had remained, holding her long skinny hands over the blaze, and apparently not much interested, one way or the other, in the operations that were going on.

‘I say,’ asked Bill, as he seated himself on a stool, ‘will you bring him before Captain Rock and the rest of the boys to-morrow night, and have him tried reg’lar ?’

‘Faith, I’ll do no such thing,’ replied the other; ‘I’ll be judge, jury, and all myself. I caught him in the act, and that’s enough. Death and no mercy to the spy and the informer—they’s the laws among the Ribbon boys. Besides, I don’t like a bone in the young vagabond’s skin;’ and the ruffian muttered something that I could not hear.

‘May be,’ responded the other in a low tone, ‘you may get into throuble.’

‘No fear, Bill, my boy. I dunno,’ he continued, ‘either, but it may be best to finish him at once. Faith, here goes.’ As he spoke, the man lifted a square stone somewhere near the hearth, and from a concealed receptacle he drew out what appeared to me, as well as I could see it, to be a large pistol; from the same opening, he took the other appliances, and proceeded deliberately to load the weapon. The poor bound creature leaped up with a desperate effort, as he noticed those fearful preparations, but fell back again, helplessly upon the seat.

‘Oh, for the love of God, Barney, don’t murder me!’ he cried in a hoarse, half-choking voice. ‘Speak to him, Nelly, speak to him!’ he continued appealingly to the old woman. None of them took the least notice of his entreaties, the old woman merely shook her head, and continued gazing into the fire. I felt tingling from head to foot with horror at the prospect of witnessing this cold-blooded murder, and was inclined, on the first impulse, to rush out at all hazards, and interfere.

‘I say, Barney,’ again exclaimed Bill, ‘why waste powder and shot on the likes of him; ’t isn’t so much we have to spare. Tell you what we’ll do: as we go down to meet the boys on the way to the colonel’s to-night, pitch him into the Wizard’s Hole; and, mind me, he’ll not come up again to tell tales.’

‘You’re right, Bill—the very thing,’ returned Barney, laying down his pistol. ‘I remember the last chap as we

tucked into the soft sheets there ; laws ! what a splash he made as the black slush closed over him ; it made me almost shiver.' A deep moan of agony, that broke from the wretched young man, told the effect that this fresh arrangement had upon him.

'There's a weight, a half-hundred, somewhere,' said Barney ; 'where is it, Nell ?'

'Oh, the old weight is it ? It's behind the sticks there, I believe. Do you want it ?'

My heart leaped to my throat at this inquiry, for just at my foot, where I stood, I felt the hard substance, that I had supposed to be a stone. 'Now for it !' I thought, as I listened in an agony to the next words.

'We'll just tie it round his waist, Bill ; 'twill be a nice buckle for his belt, and will keep him down a while in the bottom of the hole.'

'Shall I get it now ?' asked the old hag.

'Time enough,' responded the other, 'when we set out. Get us the supper, though.'

Some relief was afforded by this respite ; but the faint hope which I had just begun to entertain, that I might possibly be able to evade discovery until the men departed with their victim, and I had the old woman only to deal with, now vanished, as, when the weight came to be looked for, I was sure, of course, to be found, and as certain to be murdered. Some food was placed upon the small table drawn in front of the fire, while a candle fixed in a sconce against the wall added a feeble illumination to the firelight. The three partook of the meal in silence, and then the men smoked, during which an hour might have passed ; scarcely a sound being heard save a low moan or restless movement from the poor lad, who was evidently writhing in agony from the physical torture of the tight cording of his limbs, as well as harassed, no doubt, with the horrible apprehension of his coming doom.

‘Look out, Nell,’ were the first words spoken by Barney, that broke the stillness—‘look out, and see what time of night it is.’

The old woman rose, opened the door, and, judging by what external appearances I know not, in a few moments turned in again. ‘’Tis no more than eight o’clock,’ she said.

‘Eight o’clock! Four or five hours yet, Bill. Let’s have a sleep; we’re not to meet at the cross till one.—Do you sit up and watch, Nell; and wake us about twelve, mind.’

In a few minutes, the two miscreants had disposed themselves beside the fire, dragging over them some loose garments supplied by Nelly; and in a very short time their deep heavy breathing betokened that both were fast asleep. A turmoil of anxious thoughts literally seethed through my brain in the brief period of stillness that followed. Could I take advantage of their sleep? Could I take any step, and what, for my extrication from this dreadful peril? At length, a low parched voice, a kind of husky whisper, it seemed, rose upon the quiet of the place. ‘Nelly, for the dear love of God, have pity on me, and save me, now that they are asleep.’

There was no answer. ‘Who knows but she has dropped off too,’ I thought.

‘Nelly, if you hope for mercy yet, listen to me, save me,’ again whispered that weak voice of anguish.

‘Whisht, will ye,’ replied the old woman, evidently quite awake. ‘It’s no use your talking; you’d have sold Bill to the gallows; and if the liftin’ of my little finger would save ye, I wouldn’t.’

‘Give me a sup of wather, will ye?’ he asked. ‘I think I’ll go mad.’

‘I’ll give you that much, at anyrate,’ she said; ‘though it’s enough of it you’ll get afore long, I’m thinking.’

The old hag rose and gave him some water from a tin vessel, but bitterly persisted in her refusal either to aid his escape, or even to loosen the cords that were so cruelly

tormenting him. When Nelly replaced the water-can on the table, she replenished the fire, settled the covering more carefully round the young man Bill, and then muttered, in a kind of soliloquy : ‘No fear but I’ll wake in time ; an hour at most will do me.’ She moved towards the old bed, eyeing the prisoner’s bonds, as she passed him, to see that all was right there, and threw herself upon the rickety resting-place, that groaned and creaked beneath her weight, as she turned away from the light. ‘Thank God,’ almost passed my lips in an audible utterance. For the first time, I ventured to alter my position. I was so numbed and cramped that I could hardly stir. Soon the deep breath of the third sleeper was heard ; the candle had been extinguished. The fire burned less brightly, yet shed a crimson glow through the whole apartment, shewing me, as I gazed with less apprehension round the woodwork screen, the dusky figures and swarthy frowning faces of the two sleeping men ; while it illuminated with a fainter light the recumbent form of the doomed culprit, disclosing a ghastly face, stamped with an expression of the deepest anguish, with the eyes closed, but not in sleep, as a low sighing moan that occasionally escaped from his lips but too plainly indicated.

To take swift advantage of so unexpected a turn in the tide of danger, was of course my foremost thought, and I was just about to glide out from my hiding-place, when I remembered that considerable caution was necessary with reference to the youth Sweeny, who, utterly unconscious of my being in the apartment, might, in his surprise, give expression to some sound that would arouse the sleepers, and destroy us both. To release him from his bondage and peril, I was, of course, as resolved on as to extricate myself. I crept out as gently as I could, and stood for a moment on the floor, to see if I could attract his notice. I was just by the bed where the old woman lay, a propinquity that I dreaded, as her softer breathing intimated a lighter sleep

than seemed to have locked the two ruffians at the fire. Still the young man remained with closed eyes, and it was only as I was just beside him that he started with a bound, and glared upon me with a new terror in his face. I doubt not but that he thought, as I rose up before him so unexpectedly in that dusky light, that I was a spirit from the other world. 'Hush!' I whispered, putting my lips to his ear—'not a word,' pointing to the men. 'I was over there; I know all about you; wait till I cut those cords.' When with my penknife I had done so, he was some minutes before he could use his freed limbs. It required but few words to enjoin speed and caution. 'Do you unbar the door,' I again whispered; 'and for your life take care of a sound.' Slowly and softly, we moved on. I possessed myself of the loaded pistol that lay close by one of the sleepers, as I passed him. But our chief difficulty lay in getting the door opened. The iron bar that crossed it was fixed in a staple, and fitted it so tightly as to require considerable effort for its release, while the nervousness with which his whole frame shook made Sweeny but a clumsy hand.

'Let me try,' I said at last in despair.

I had just succeeded in drawing out the bar, and with scarcely a sound, when my companion, in a horrified tone, cried: 'For God's sake, hurry; I hear the old woman stirring.'

I instantly pulled the bolt back more rapidly; and not aware of its weight, it fell with a dull heavy clang on the earthen floor. I hardly now know what at that terrible moment we did. There was an instantaneous rustling movement from the bed; but we waited for nothing. All I can recollect is, that, quick as lightning, we were both out upon the heath. 'I'll hold you; I don't know the way,' I gasped, as I dreaded that my companion might think only of himself, and desert me. I am sure that he never dreamed of doing so. He seized me tightly by the arm; and on we

went headlong, plunging through swamps, and more than once falling over some unseen impediment. The night was very dark, and I trusted entirely to my guide. Want of breath at last compelled us to halt, and we stood panting for a moment. Not a sound of any kind reached us. If pursued at first, our foes must have been at fault, as we heard nothing of them.

‘Tell me, what was to be done to-night at the colonel’s?’ I asked Sweeny.

‘Fire and murder,’ was his expressive answer.

‘Come on there at once—you know the way,’ I said—‘will you?’

‘Yes;’ and without another word, diverging a little from the course we had been pursuing, we again hurried forward with fresh speed. We soon reached the termination of the bog, crossed a road, and got into some fields.

‘Over here,’ whispered Sweeny, ‘is the colonel’s.’ ‘Colonel Grey,’ he added, in reply to an inquiry. ‘What are you going to do there?’

‘To warn them—to save them, to be sure,’ I answered. ‘And never fear,’ I continued, as I noticed some reluctance on the part of the lad; ‘I saved you already, and I’ll take care of you still: no harm shall come to you.’

We continued our course through two or three fields, and turned out on what appeared to me to be a narrow by-road, when suddenly, as if from the ditch close to us, a deep hoarse voice gave a challenge: ‘Who goes there?’

‘May I never!’ ejaculated Sweeny, in a trembling whisper; ‘if ’t isn’t the boys: they’re waitin’ here for the rest to go up to the colonel’s.’

‘Answer them boldly,’ I whispered.

Sweeny replied to the challenge, when a rapid cross-questioning ensued, and some pass-words were demanded and given.

‘Who’s with you?’ asked the speaker who challenged us,

now standing out on the road, and who seemed to be the leader of the party who were still concealed in the ditch.

A momentary hesitation nearly proved fatal to us.

'Oh,' he answered, and his voice shook, 'tis Bill, sure. We are to go on, Barney said, and see all's right, and give you the signal.'

'You had better stay here,' gruffly responded the speaker. 'Go on, indeed. What signal?'

'Just a whistle, and no more; I must be ruled by Barney, as he's the leader to-night,' replied Sweeny, with an affectation of sulkiness in his tone, that shewed more presence of mind than I had hoped for.

'Well, on with you then; and if you spoil it all, 't isn't my doing.' And, to my infinite relief, the speaker sank again into the shelter from which he had emerged.

We passed leisurely forward beside the lurking party, afraid to go fast, lest suspicion should be aroused; but we had not advanced a dozen paces, when the hard heavy tramp of feet, running at full speed upon the road, distinctly reached our ears; and from the stir among the ambushed men, was evidently heard by them too.

'On, on, for our very lives!' exclaimed Sweeny. 'Come this way—quick;' and he plunged in among some thick plantations, through which it was no easy task in the darkness to advance. We caught, as we forced our way through, voices loud and furious behind us, and the single terrible expression: 'Hell's fire, man, be after them!' discovered to us at once the danger we had to apprehend.

'This way, this way,' cried Sweeny, dragging me forward: 'we may do them yet.'

In two or three minutes, we reached a small wooden door in a wall, with which my companion seemed acquainted. He opened it quickly; and then, when we passed through, bolted it on the other side. It admitted us into what looked like the extensive back-premises of a spacious mansion, that

rose up dark and gloomy on our left. Sweeny strode rapidly on to where a single light was burning in a small window, low, near the ground. At this, he gave two peculiar taps. At once the light moved.

‘The moment he opens the door,’ whispered Sweeny—‘that he’s coming now to do—you manage him with that,’ pointing to the pistol I had. ‘’Tis Griffen, the butler, I mean ; he’s in the plot ; and then you can alarm the house ; and there’s not a moment to be lost.’

Most cautiously, an old gray-haired, respectable-looking servant opened the door at which we had stationed ourselves.

‘Is it all right, Barney ?’ asked a low voice.

‘Yes, to be sure,’ exclaimed Sweeny, pushing in, as I followed ; and instantly shutting the door again behind us, he seized the candle from the man’s hand, while, with the butt-end of the pistol, I dealt the treacherous servant a blow that effectually hindered his interfering.

‘Go up the stairs there now,’ cried Sweeny, ‘and wake them up : I’ll stay here.’

I dashed on with my pistol, and narrowly escaped being shot down myself, as a close to my strange adventure, by a half-dressed gentleman, who confronted me on the lobby.

‘Stop !’ I cried, ‘till I explain. Your house is just about to be attacked ; I am here to warn you.’

A few words put him in possession of all that was necessary then to inform him. A night of alarm and confusion followed within the building ; but, to our surprise, no attempt from without was made ; why, we could not tell. My strange first acquaintance with Colonel Grey led to a close intimacy—though not in Tipperary, as he soon after left the county—resulting in what in no way concerns this present narrative. The poor lad Sweeny was well provided for, and sent abroad ; and for myself, I only add, that I never had reason to regret the mistake that led to such unexpected consequences.



B E T S Y ' S B E A U .

IT is a thing that I never did allow, and that I never will allow,' said my wife, making up for her small person and unimposing aspect, by speaking very loudly, and as if she had had large experience in servants—lessons duly instilled by a lady, a near relative, who kindly supervises our domestic affairs, and pays us long visits. 'If it had been a relative, or I had been asked, I might not have objected ; but I must beg that nothing of the kind ever occur again,' said my wife, in continuation of her lecture.

'But please, 'm, he didn't have nothink to eat,' said our one handmaiden deprecatingly, but with somewhat of an injured tone.

'I was not alluding to that, Elizabeth,' said Mrs Scribe severely, 'but to the principle. I do not go so far as to say I will not allow followers ; but if anything similar to last night's affair takes place, I shall consider that you have forfeited your situation.—Now, clear away the breakfast-things.'

'“Anything similar to last night's affair,”' I said, repeating my wife's words, as soon as Elizabeth had indignantly swept the table, and then herself out of the room. 'I

suppose "anything similar" means another life-guard or a grenadier ?'

'Now, don't be absurd, dear,' was the reply. 'Of course, we cannot allow such goings on.'

'We ?' said I.

'Well, there then, *I* cannot allow such goings on ; and I'm sure you do not wish me to go down into my own kitchen of a night, to be startled by great scarlet men.'

'You never evinced any fear of the great scarlet lady, my dear,' I ventured to observe, and making what I thought a very pungent allusion to sundry leanings towards vestments, candles, incense, and flowers, as displayed at a neighbouring church.

'How witty !' was the caustic rejoinder ; when I took refuge in the morning paper, and afterwards beat a retreat city-ward.

By way of peace-offering, I came back that evening bearing 'the neatest thing' I could purchase in the shape of umbrellas ; but it was not warmly received.

'Elizabeth has given warning this afternoon,' said my wife.

'Tit for tat,' I replied ; 'for I'm sure you gave her warnings enough this morning.'

'And now I think the best thing to be done is to let her go ; for the silly thing is quite infatuated with the great tall booby I found in the kitchen last night, and has done nothing but sob, and cry, and go on, ever since.'

'I trust that there are no briny pearls in this soup ?' I said.

'Of course not,' was the reply. 'I made it myself.'

'How weak are women,' I remarked after a pause ; 'and yet how hard upon each other's failings. "None but the brave deserve the fair," says the proverb ; and the fair think, in consequence, that they have the only right to the brave.'

'The brave ! Such stuff ! Why, I believe, George, if you

had your way, you would encourage the girl in her mad fit. A soldier, indeed, without a penny to help himself, let alone to keep a wife !'

'But the manly beauty—the uniform !' I suggested.

'Manly nonsense !'

'And besides, it does not seem fair that the whole of the military force should be monopolised by the nursemaids, leaving only Policeman X for the cooks, and'——

'There !' exclaimed my wife ; 'look at that ! Did you ever see such audacity ?'

Turning immediately, I could not refrain from a smile, for plainly shewn upon the window-blind by the street lamp was the shadow of a huge life-guardsman, his well-padded chest, fierce moustache, and elegantly balanced foraging-cap being displayed to great advantage.

'That's the same man !' exclaimed my wife ; 'and now, if you watch, you will see him pass the window and go down the area.'

'The soles are getting cold, my love,' I said ; 'and I should infinitely prefer a portion, to turning myself into a vedette to watch the movements of the enemy. Now, if your respected mamma had happened to be here !'

'Now, don't be ungenerous. I'm sure mamma never suggested anything that was not for your good, George.'

'Perhaps not, my love,' I said ; 'but it is not always agreeable to take physic, however beneficial it may prove.—Thanks ! Now I'll trouble you for the anchovy. No potatoes, thank you.—Shall I ring for the other things ? Slow-moving Betsy will not have them up before we have done with the fish.'

'If you please,' was the very polite reply, and turning my head, I found that the shadow-picture upon the blind had disappeared.

'Of course it has,' said my wife, who had divined my thoughts. 'And he is now down in the kitchen, feasting

upon the tit-bits supplied to him by that disgraceful creature.'

'Let's ring and startle them, then,' said I; and leaving my chair, I gave a lusty peal at the bell.

In the course of a minute or two up came Elizabeth, very smart, and very ruddy of cheek—due, no doubt, to the cooking—and began to change the dishes.

'Did I not hear some one down-stairs, Elizabeth?' said my diplomatic wife.

'Down-stairs, mum? No, mum; not since the milk came.'

'Oh, that was at four o'clock,' said my wife; 'I mean just now.'

'No, mum, not as I've heard: the bell hasn't been touched for a good hour.'

'Oh!' said my wife, and then all was silent, while the soup and fish were removed, and the partridges Smyth sent us were placed upon the table; when the maid disappeared.

'Pity she admires, or rather has her destiny ruled by, Mars, for she is a capital cook,' I said, going on with the carving. 'Daresay she reads *Zadkiel*.'

'Of course,' said my wife; 'and *Bow Bells*, and the *London Journal*, and *Family Herald*, and all sorts of stuff.'

'And the *Moonstone*, and *Birds of Prey*, I suppose, too,' I observed; 'but perhaps she does not favour *Mudie*.'

'If you wish to send me up to my bedroom in tears, George, pray say so. I'm sure I don't know what I have done that'—sob—'that'—sob—pocket-handkerchief, and one tear right in the bread-sauce.

But the next moment, plainly heard, there was the buzz, buzz of a manly voice, a giggle, a squeak, and the scraping of a chair—all plainly heard to proceed from the kitchen—coming up, as it were, through the floor; for the houses in New Park Crescent are very slightly built, so slightly, indeed, that we have never started a piano of our own, in

consequence of the abundance of musical sounds proceeding from Nos. 4 and 6, right and left of us.

'A deceitful creature!' exclaimed my wife, no longer tearful; 'and did she not declare to my face, ten minutes ago, that there was no one down-stairs?—Ring the bell, George.'

'Not till I've finished my dinner in peace, my love,' I said firmly, 'even if there were the whole of the Turkish Contingent down-stairs. After dinner, I'm at your service; but if I am to engage Shaw the life-guardsmen, I must have another glass or two of sherry first.—Who the deuce can that be?' I exclaimed, for a cab stopped at the gate, and there was a loud ring at the front bell.

Then came the soft patter of poor Elizabeth's feet, the opening of the front door, a short sharp altercation, as if a cabman were dissatisfied with his fare, and then my wife started from her chair exclaiming: 'Why, it's mamma!'

'You don't say so!'

'George!' exclaimed my wife; and the next moment the door opened: there was embracing; and I had to leave the choicest, brownest tit-bit of partridge on my plate, to be kissed and called 'my dear boy!'

'No; ' she would not have the soup up—mamma would not. She was so sorry, but the train was late, or she would have been with us in time to sit down to dinner.—There was a sole left, was there? Then she would have that; it could not be so very cold.

'Bring the fish back, Elizabeth,' said my wife; and it was evident that for the present Mars was completely out of her memory.

A few minutes elapsed, during which 'dear mamma' had a glass of sherry, and then Elizabeth came back holding in her hand the head of a sole; the one, I was ready to swear, I had left on my plate, for I knew by its gouged-out eye.

'Oh, 'm, if you please, 'm!' exclaimed Elizabeth.

'Well, Elizabeth?' said my wife.

'That there cat, 'm, while I was up answering the door. There was nothing left but this here head, mum, as I was just in time to see it jump off the table on to the floor.'

'You careless creature!' cried my wife, 'to leave it like that. There, bring a hot plate.—Have a little partridge, mamma, dear?'

Directly after, I saw some one's face change, and a very suspicious look was directed at the handmaid, but that young lady evidently saw nothing; and the meal passed off in a most satisfactory way—that is to say, as far as appearances went—for I knew that I did not have anything like my share of the birds.

At last I was left alone to have my one glass or two of claret, and the ladies ascended, as I supposed, to the drawing-room; while, under the idea that the new arrival would render her secure from interruption, the fair Elizabeth descended to the nether regions.

'Now, I wonder whether that gentleman is below stairs?' I thought; and then, somehow, my ideas were shunted off on to another line, and went off at express rate, till I was roused by hearing the front door open.

'Who in the world is that going out?' I thought, and then I listened for the closing, but in vain; while directly after a strange ghostly shadow passed the window, which shade I made out to be that of my respected mother-in-law, with a mantle over her head.

'Why, she's going down into the kitchen,' I muttered; and leaving my seat, I opened the door just in time to catch my wife in the passage.

'Oh, I see!' I exclaimed softly; 'going to attack the enemy front and rear. Elaborate tactics, I must say!'

'You need not trouble yourself, sir, unless you please,' was the reply. 'I daresay mamma and I can discomfit the enemy, as you term him, without your help.'

'But are you sure there is any one below?' I said.

'O dear no, sir! only that there is a cat there with a strong love for fried soles!'

'There, come along!' I said, for there was no help for it; and if there is anything I dislike, it is meddling with the servants and their belongings.

But we had not half descended the kitchen stairs, before we heard loud voices in altercation.

'That I'm sure there ain't, mum, if it's the last words I had to utter, mum, there ain't; and if missus was here'——

'Your mistress is here, Elizabeth!' said my wife, now entering the kitchen, with the writer following, feeling very small, and taking in the *coup d'œil* of Mrs Scribe's mamma standing at the area door, and Betsy keeping guard over that leading into the back-kitchen.

'Take the candle and look in the coal-cellar, George,' said my mother-in-law. 'I'm certain I heard some man's voice down-stairs.'

'It must have been next door, sir,' said Betsy, appealing to me.

'Walls are thin!' I suggested, feeling disposed to draw off the forces, and to give the unfortunate enemy, if one there were, an opportunity to retreat.

'Struc as goodness, mum, there's no one here,' said Betsy.

'Oh, you bad abandoned hussy!' exclaimed Mrs Scribe's mamma, shaking her head at the maiden.—'Why don't you look in the coal-cellar, George?'

I felt disposed to swear at the coal-cellar; but Mrs Scribe just then whispering 'Must I go?' I went, to make the pleasant discovery that there was not above a sack left of the last two tons; but Mars was not there, neither was he in the dust-bin; and coming back out of the area, I found our dear mamma peering in the kitchen cupboard, and apparently about next to open the drawers of the dresser.

All this time, Poor Betsy, with the palest of pale faces, was keeping guard over the back-kitchen door, which my wife now approached.

‘Which surely, mum, you’re not going to bemean yourself by going in that dirty place, mum?’ said the girl.

‘Dirty, indeed, I’ve no doubt,’ said Mrs Scribe’s mamma.

‘There; why not take the girl’s word?’ said I, wishing, with my customary pusillanimity, to make a compromise. ‘Is there any one—a soldier in that back-kitchen, Elizabeth?’

But instead of answering, the girl buried her face in her apron, and began to sob bitterly, when, leading her aside, the ladies opened the door, and motioned to me to go first.

What could I do but obey? So, taking up the candle I had the moment before set down, I stepped boldly in, feeling sure that the murder must now be out. But no; the one large cupboard stood wide open, and there was no one behind the door; the place was perfectly empty.

‘Look under the table, George!’ exclaimed Mrs Scribe’s mamma.

‘Don’t talk nonsense!’ I exclaimed. ‘Why, a cat could not hide itself under that table.—Now, I hope you are satisfied;’ and hanging down the candlestick, I strode back to our little dining-room, soon after hearing the ladies go upstairs.

Poor Betsy looked very pale and troubled when she came to announce tea; but I was not surprised, and spoke kindly to the girl, believing that this time she had been unjustly accused; and then went and partook of my comfortless cup.

The tea was removed, and an hour passed, and then Mrs Scribe’s mamma, fatigued with her journey from Hastings, retired to her bedroom—what in most houses would have been the back drawing-room—while I descended to my little den behind the dining-room, to try to finish an article com-

menced that morning, Mrs Scribe following shortly, to sit by my fire and 'tatt,' that being her custom when I am disposed to work after tea.

We were both in very severe moods, she upon her low *bergère* stool, I at my table; and for a time nothing was heard but the clicking of Mrs S.'s tatting shuttle, and the scratching of my pen.

But there was no article-finishing that night with so many clouds in the horizon; for, raising my eyes, I could see a couple of tears stealing down on either side of the prettiest little nose in the world; my pen dropped; the tatting fell all of a horrible tangle; and then some one was on her knees at my feet, and I was just going to press my lips on the white forehead within their reach, when there was a noise!

Yes; there was a noise—a strange, hair-stirring groan, apparently at our shoulders; and then the sound of footsteps on the stairs, in the passage, and then a loud flop, as of some one falling on the oil-cloth, followed by hysterical sobs and cries.

We leaped up and opened the door, to find poor Betsy apparently in a fit—now sobbing, now crying, now shrieking, and pouring forth 'Ohs!' innumerable, but quite incapable of answering questions.

Then came the ringing of Mrs Scribe's mamma's bell, and, as it was of course not answered, the opening of her door, and her voice descending to know what all the groaning meant that she could hear.

And now, not only from Betsy, but as from the wall, came groan after groan—loud, heart-wrung, half-stifled groans, similar to that which had first startled us, and which I had laid to the credit of Betsy.

'Oh,' exclaimed dear mamma, 'it is some poor creature dying next door, and the cries have frightened this poor girl.—Run, George, and see if you can be of any avail.'

Then came more groans, and several distinct knocks at the wall.

‘There, there ; pray, go, dear,’ said my wife ; ‘some one must be in great peril.’

Directly after there was a loud peal at the front-door bell, and on going, I found my neighbour Jones evidently come for help.

‘What is the matter ?’

‘What is the matter ?’

Both in a breath.

‘Some one must be dying at your house,’ said Jones.

‘No, no ; at your house,’ I said.

‘But we can hear the groans in our library.’

‘So can we in ours !’ I exclaimed. ‘Come here.’ And leading the way into the back-room, there we could hear the stifled groans again.

‘It’s in your house,’ I said.

‘No, no ; it’s in the chimney,’ exclaimed Mr Jones.

‘Good Heavens ! there’ll be some one smothered !’

‘Yes, yes, yes ; chimney, chimney,’ shrieked Elizabeth ; and then she went off again into strong, genuine hysterics.

‘Is any one there ?’ I cried, going close to the wall.

‘Oh-h-h !’ came back a dismal groan in reply ; and now a light burst upon my brain.

‘Here, Jones—this way,’ I cried ; and snatching up the little lamp, I was going down-stairs, when the shrieking of the ladies in protest at being left in the dark arrested me.

‘Want a light ?’ said a gruff voice ; and, starting, I looked round to encounter a policeman, who, attracted by Betsy’s screams, had come in by the open door.

‘Here—this way, my man,’ I cried. ‘There is some one stuck in the chimney.’

‘In the what ?’ he exclaimed incredulously.

‘Oh-h-h !’ came from the wall again.

‘It’s t’other side ; that’s what it is,’ said the policeman.

'It isn't, I tell you,' cried Jones. 'There, man ; listen.'

'Oh-h-h !' came now, and a strange rustling noise as of some one struggling.

'I'm blest if there ain't !' exclaimed the constable.

'Here—this way ; I know,' I said ; and, leading the way, we soon stood in the back-kitchen, where, by the help of the policeman's bull's-eye, I could just make out a pair of boot-soles up the chimney, and something glistening, which I made out to be spurs.

We shouted up the chimney ; but no answer came, and there was only an occasional kicking of the boots—feeble kicking, as if their occupier was in a sore strait.

'Let's go up-stairs again,' said the policeman. 'He's stuck tight, that's what he is ;' and, obedient to the voice of law, we followed to the back-room, where, after tapping at the wall two or three times, and eliciting a faint groan that sounded something like 'Help!' the constable started off—rather leisurely, I thought—but soon returned with a crowbar-and-hammer armed bricklayer, and another policeman.

There was no stopping to tear up our Brussels carpet, for, attacking the wall, bricks, mortar, plaster, and torn paper soon formed a dusty heap ; and after guiding himself by listening once or twice, in an incredibly short space of time there was a hole made through into the chimney communicating with the back-kitchen, and through that hole came a faint sigh.

'Come ; hold up, old chap, whoever you are,' said one of the policemen ; and then to me : 'Got a drop of brandy, sir ?'

I soon fetched the spirit, and then, in the sight of the horrified women, the hole was sufficiently enlarged to lay bare a ghastly, soot-blackened face, with protruding eyeballs and grinning teeth ; but as the air seemed to reach the man's lungs more purely, there was a change took place, aided by

some brandy administered in a spoon by one of the policemen.

It was all plain enough now, and I was not much surprised, when, the hole being sufficiently enlarged, a tall, stout life-guardsmen was dragged out, but only to fall upon the rubbish-heap, completely exhausted.

'Found on the premises for felonious purposes,' said one policeman. 'Course you'll press the charge, sir?'

But I did not answer, being too much taken up with the poor fellow before me, whom it was evident a few more minutes would have stifled.

'Couldn't you get down again?' I asked him, as soon as he could speak.

'No; not an inch, sir—nor yet up—jammed in,' he gasped; 'and 'eat from next chimney, too, seemed to stop my breath.'

'How did you get there, eh?' queried one policeman.

'There; don't bother him,' I said. 'I know; and he's half dead now.—Here; have some more brandy.'

'Thanky, sir,' he gasped feebly, and swallowed a little, but only with great difficulty; and it was pitiful to see the complete prostration of the great fellow; his gay scarlet jacket reduced to a blackened, torn dilapidation; and his trim whiskers and moustache all limp and mortar-filled.

'Why didn't you knock or call for help sooner?' I said, as I knelt down by him.

'I couldn't, master,' he whispered. 'I hadn't the heart, for the poor lass's sake; and I wouldn't have groaned when I did, if I could have kept 'em back.'

I always was weak; but if the true man did not stand out there, I thought, I'm no judge: suffice it, those few earnest words had quite won me to his side, and I had mapped out my course.

'You'll press the charge?' said one of the policemen again.

'No,' I said firmly. 'The poor fellow had no felonious

intent, and he has been punished enough without what will follow for breaking barrack-law.'

'Absurd!' exclaimed Mrs Scribe's mamma shrilly. 'I desire, George, that you have him taken off to prison directly, or we shall all be murdered in our beds.'

'The sooner you are in yours, madam, I think, the better,' I said politely; 'for your costume'——

She stayed to hear no more, for her dressing-gown and night-cap, hitherto forgotten in the excitement, disappeared like magic, followed by a banging door. I satisfied, then, the grinning policemen and the bricklayer; and, moved by egregious folly, as Mrs Scribe's mamma afterwards told me, I allowed the wretched man to pass the night in an easy-chair, seeing him off myself almost as soon as it was light.

Betsy left us at the end of a week, and I must own to always supporting Mrs Scribe in her determination to have no followers from the neighbouring barracks. Whether our maid married the man of her choice, I know not; but this I do know, that a great piece of my little library Brussels was totally spoiled; and if we wanted a reminder when loud talking or sounds from the next house had ceased to startle us in the late hours, when sitting together—if, I say, we wanted a reminder, there it was in faded paper over the new wall, which marked the hole from which we were favoured with the advent of Betsy's Beau.

P.S.—Probably owing to the shock to her nerves, Mrs Scribe's mamma returned to Hastings the next day, and did not visit us again for six months.



THE STATION-MASTER'S DAUGHTER.

I HAD lost sight of my old college-chum, Fred Pepper, for several years, till I accepted an invitation from him last autumn to stay a week with him at his home in one of the midland counties. According to arrangement, he met me at Wallington Junction, a station about twenty miles from his house, the remainder of the journey having to be performed on a branch-line of railway.

‘You will have to take a fresh ticket here,’ said Fred, after I had alighted from the train, and we had greeted each other with a hearty shake of the hand. ‘You will find the booking-office at the upper end of the platform.’

I went to the window indicated by my friend, and obtained the needful ticket ; noticing at the same time, that I was waited upon by a young woman who appeared to be quite a mite of a young woman, so slenderly proportioned was she, so slight of figure ; with large, shy, brown eyes, and brown hair ; with small, pale, clearly-cut features ; hardly to be called pretty, but with an expression of candour and good temper that was infinitely pleasing ; having on a dress of dark-gray wincey, with the neatest little collar and cuffs imaginable, and a bow of pink ribbon to set off the whiteness of her slender throat ; and with a dainty activity in her every movement that was very beguiling to look upon.

Whatever touches of adornment the otherwise dingy office had received were due to her busy little fingers ; to her evidently belonged the three pots of scarlet geraniums, and the box of mignonette in the window ; the canary, lively and loud-voiced, in its circular wire-cage ; the elaborate piece of embroidery on the desk ; and a green-backed volume of poems.

‘Are all your booking-clerks in this part of the country as charming as the one who has just waited on me?’ inquired I of Fred.

‘Ah, you have seen little Madge Carliston, I suppose,’ said he ; ‘but you must not expect to find another like her. Have you never heard of her before? Well, then, I must relate to you a little circumstance which happened three or four years ago, and which made Madge quite a heroine in these parts. Let us secure a compartment to ourselves, and then you shall have it.’

My friend was well known on the line, and the guard civilly locked the door at his bidding, and secured us from intrusion. Having fixed ourselves therefore comfortably in opposite corners, Fred proceeded to favour me with the following narrative, while the train wound leisurely along through a level fruitful country, well wooded, and watered by numerous streams, with the yellow September sunshine lighting up the landscape like a pensive smile.

‘Some years ago,’ commenced he, ‘old David Carliston, the father of Madge, was station-master at Birkwood, a little roadside place, about fifteen miles from Wallington Junction. David had been a soldier in his younger days, could shew two or three medals, and had probably obtained his post on the line through the interest of some friendly director, rather than from any particular aptitude he himself displayed. He had been a widower for many years, and his small household was managed by his daughter Margaret, or Madge, as she was generally called by her father and every one else.

‘There was very little traffic, either goods or passenger, at Birkwood ; in fact, it had not been opened till several years after the completion of the rest of the line, and then only at the instance of two or three influential county families, who wished to have a station in convenient proximity to their houses : so that the life led by David and his daughter was a very lonely one ; the village of Birkwood itself, which contained only about a couple of hundred inhabitants, lying a mile and a half away down the main road.

‘It thus fell out that Madge, having much leisure time on her hands, gradually initiated herself into the duties of a clerk at a small station ; being, indeed, very nimble with her pen, and in that respect the reverse of David, who found sufficient occupation to his mind in attending to the signals, and the outside work generally, and in digging his little plot of garden-ground, part of an embankment running parallel with the line. David’s duties were over by eight o’clock in the evening, there being no train which stopped at Birkwood between that hour and seven in the morning ; and having seen that his night-signals were all right, the old soldier would, if the weather were fine, generally trudge down into the village, to smoke his pipe and drink an evening glass at the *Farriers’ Arms*, at which place, by virtue of his military experiences and his two medals, he was looked upon as a hero whose dictum was in no case to be disputed. These nightly visits to the *Farriers’ Arms* were a source of no small disquietude to Madge, for it not unfrequently happened that David, rendered forgetful by the excitement of congenial company, and by the rude but genuine applause which always greeted his stories of warlike adventure, would imbibe more of the *Farriers’* heady home-brewed than he could conveniently carry, and would reach home at a late hour in a state which permitted no recollection next morning of how he got there. A few quiet words from Madge, while the freshness of his remorse was still upon him, had always the

effect of restraining his vagaries for several weeks to come, when some evening the temptation would again prove too strong for him, and he would have his "fling," as he called it; to be followed, as before, by a season of penitence, and more futile resolutions not to transgress again.

'It was hardly likely that such a girl as Madge Carliston could have reached the age of seventeen, even in a remote place like Birkwood, without having suitors for her hand. Part of the attraction too, in this respect, might be due to the fact that old David had, a short time before, been the recipient of a legacy amounting to two hundred pounds, which, as he was fond of boasting in his cups, had been put untouched into the bank, there to accumulate for the ultimate benefit of his daughter. Of the unfortunate rejected ones who had been sent about their business, with no measure of hard words, but with a gentle refusal, uttered half reluctantly, as though she were unwilling to inflict so much pain, the only one known to me by name was young Will Ferguson, a guard on the line. Will had tried his fortune, and had been rejected, like others before him; but whether there was something in Madge's soft refusal which would not permit him to despair of success, or whether it was owing to the constancy and true nature of his affection, he still went on loving as before, and would by no means take his rejection as final. "It's a woman's privilege to change her mind," he would say; "and who knows but that Madge may change hers."

'Will's most formidable rival was handsome black-eyed Dick Carradus, son of Lord Alfreton's bailiff—a village scapegrace, who had been turned out of doors by his father some years before; had then gone to Australia, and had come back, after being five years away, quite as poor as he went, and was now living at home on sufferance, till something should turn up likely to suit his lazy abilities.

'Dick had not been back long before he singled out little

Madge Carliston as the object of his attentions. He began by paying court to her father, and would lounge up to the station of a morning, having no work of his own to engage him, and smoke and chat with the old man between trains, listen with respectful attention to his long-winded stories, retail the latest village news, and give him now and then a helping-hand with his garden ; so that, after a time, the morning seemed long and dull which was not enlivened by a visit from laughing, good-tempered Dick. To Madge, he made no open profession of his love, being quick enough to perceive that she was one of those who are not to be won in a day ; but he let her see in twenty different ways how constantly she dwelt in his thoughts. To what extent he succeeded in winning her affections, no one ever knew ; but that she was inclined to favour his suit, seems certain : indeed, it would have been strange if a girl of her limited experience and slight knowledge of the world, without any previous liking for another, had remained insensible to the manifold attractions of Dick. His eyes were so bright, his laugh was so ready and so genial, his temper seemed so unspoiled by the world, of which he had seen so much, that it was no wonder Madge felt the fortress of her heart begin to give way before the fascinations of a suitor so blithe and *débonnaire*.

‘Matters had progressed thus for some months, without seeming to progress at all, when, one autumn forenoon, Dick lounged up to the station accompanied by a stranger, whom he presented to David as his friend Mr Kulp, from Australia. Madge, who was looking on unseen from behind the blind that shaded the open window, thought she had never seen a more sinister and ill-looking visage than that of Mr Kulp. He was dressed in a new, shiny suit of black, in which he looked very awkward and ill at ease, his great horny hands being especially difficult to dispose of, and wandering incessantly into his pockets and out of them

again ; he would evidently have felt more at home in the red shirt and highlows of a digger. His face and neck were the colour of a brick, and his shaggy red hair and long red beard, rudely trimmed by some country barber, did not add to the attractiveness of his appearance. His features were bold, and sufficiently well shaped ; but the expression of his eyes was so thoroughly bad, that it was impossible to be mistaken as to the nature of the soul that gazed loweringly out of their treacherous depths. Madge could not help wondering to herself how it happened that laughing, careless Dick had come to choose such a man as this Kulp for his companion ; and when her father called to her to go out to him on the platform, she pretended not to hear, but stole away noiselessly to her room up-stairs, and shut herself in.

"Dang the girl !" said old David irately ; "she either don't hear, or else she's stupid, and won't come because there's a stranger here. But sit down, lads, sit down, and I'll go and draw a jug of beer myself." So David went into the house, and presently returned with a jug of ale and some glasses ; and Mr Kulp having produced some cigars, the three sat down on one of the benches outside the station, and proceeded to enjoy themselves after their own fashion.

"We had Lord Alfreton's family here yesterday afternoon," said David after a while. "There was three truck-load of luggage and things, besides eight horses, and a lot of dogs ; and a rare lot of money it came to. Fact is," continued the old soldier, "I never was so busy since I came here as I've been this morning ; for Baylis, the cattle-drover, sent me word a week ago to get him twenty wagons ready by this morning ; and sure enough, by five o'clock he was here with a lot of staring half-mad bullocks ; and rare and cold it was too at that hour ; but we got them all safe into the trucks, and the engine fetched them at eight o'clock—quite a little train of themselves. And then Baylis came into the house, and had a bit of breakfast with me ; and paid me for the

carriage of the cattle. Why, lads, I shall have over a hundred and fifty pounds to send to bank in the morning. I'll warrant such a thing never happened before since Birkwood was a station ;" and the old man chuckled to himself as he emptied his glass, and seemed to look upon the whole matter as an excellent joke.

'Shortly afterwards, Dick and Mr Kulp took their leave ; the former depositing on the window-sill a little bunch of flowers for Madge, who still kept resolutely within doors. The two walked slowly down the road, conversing earnestly together ; Mr Kulp apparently endeavouring to impress some important point on the attention of the half-reluctant Dick ; and in a few minutes the latter came hastily back, and going up to David, who was busy digging in his garden by this time, said : " You'll be down at the *Farriers'* to-night, won't you, governor ? There's to be a bit of a dahlia-show among the villagers, and they'll be sure to want you to act as one of the judges."

" I'll drop down, lad, after the eight o'clock train has gone, and that's as soon as I can leave—not that I know much about dahlias, but I can give my opinion, I daresay, as well as another man."

'So, with a renewed good-morning, Dick finally departed, and having rejoined Mr Kulp, who was lounging over a gate waiting the return of his friend, the two went on their way together, and were quickly lost to view.

'All these proceedings had been witnessed by Madge from her eyrie, but she had been too far away to hear the conversation between Dick and her father in the garden. When she was certain that the two were finally gone, she stole down-stairs, and taking possession of the flowers, kissed them, and put them carefully into water ; then she went about her work, humming an old song to herself ; but she could not get rid of the idea that the malignant eyes of Mr Kulp were furtively watching her wherever she went.

‘When David had attended to the eight o’clock train, he went into the house, and changed his hat and coat, telling Madge he was going into the village, but that he should not be late in coming home. Madge was too much accustomed to her father’s evening absences to think anything of this, and had learned from experience that when he announced his intention of being home at an early hour, he was pretty sure to be later than common. Having arranged his neck-tie to her satisfaction, and given him a parting kiss, she stood watching his retreating figure till it had disappeared down the darkening road, and then went back indoors, and having made up the fire, and lighted the candle, she sat down to her sewing, quite content to pass the long evening all alone in the solitary station-house.

‘Having sewn till she was tired, she put her work away, and then got out her hymn-book, and marked one or two hymns to be sung by her scholars at school on the following Sunday ; then she read awhile ; and then, all unconsciously to herself, her eyes softly closed, and she knew nothing more.

‘She was roused by the clock close above her head striking eleven, and at the moment she opened her eyes she was startled by seeing, or believing that she saw, the handle of the door on the opposite side of the room slowly and noiselessly turned, as though some one were trying to open it from the outside. The door in question led on to the platform, but fortunately she had shot the bolt into its place after seeing her father down the road. The blood thrilled through her heart as she gazed with a sort of horrible fascination on the revolving handle, and in a moment she was as thoroughly awake as ever she had been in her life. She listened, with all her senses on the alert, but the silence remained unbroken save by the ticking of the clock, and the faint singing of the telegraph wires in the breeze outside. She kept her eyes fixed intently on the door for what seemed to her an intolerably long time, but there was no movement, nor any sign of

life other than her own beating heart ; so, with a sigh of relief, she at length wrenched her eyes away, and persuaded herself that, in the confusion of that first waking moment, her senses must have misled her. The hour was late, and her father could not be long now ; so she would just make everything secure below stairs, and then go and lie down on her bed without undressing, in readiness to run down at his first knock.

‘ It was hardly pleasant going about the house after seeing that strange movement of the door-handle, but she nerved herself to the effort, although the eyes of Mr Kulp seemed to stare out at her with baleful intensity from every dusky corner, and to lie in wait for her behind every door. But the task, after all, was only a short one ; and when she had seen that all the doors and windows were properly secured, and that there was nothing to be feared from the fire, she took up her candle, and walked slowly and steadily up the short flight of stairs which led to her own and her father’s bedrooms, on the upper floor. After glancing into the latter room, and seeing that the cash-box was there as usual, on the chest of drawers, she passed forward into her own chamber, the window of which looked out at the back of the station, and down the road that led to the village.

‘ It was David’s custom, as an extra measure of precaution, to place the cash-box in his bedroom overnight. After the departure of the last train, he made up his receipts for the day, and put the amount into the box which travelled backward and forward between the bank and the station, ready for conveyance to headquarters ; so that, when Madge saw the box where it always stood overnight, she felt quite satisfied as to its safety, and never once thought whether the amount it contained might be great or small.

‘ Perfectly assured by this time that the movement of the door-handle was a pure piece of imagination on her part, and having quite recovered the steadiness of her nerves, now that

she was safe in her own little bower, she sat down in front of the glass, and leisurely proceeded to brush out her long brown hair, pausing now and then to smell at the bouquet left by Dick, and humming a familiar tune to herself, wondering how much later her father would be, and becoming more anxious, as the time verged on towards midnight, as to the condition in which he would reach home. She had sat thus for some time when she was startled by the noise of something striking against the window. She got up, put the candle in the furthest corner of the room, drew aside the blind, and looked out. The moon was nearly at the full, but thick masses of cloud overshadowed the sky, leaving only a sort of dull half-light, in which nothing could be clearly discerned. There was, however, sufficient light for Madge to make out the familiar figure of Dick Carradus beckoning to her with one hand, as though he wished to speak to her. Her fears took alarm at once; something had happened to her father, and Dick had come to break the bad news to her! She drew up the blind, and flung open the window, with hands that trembled so much that they could scarcely do her bidding, dreading, yet longing, to know the worst. "Your father has been taken with a fit at the *Farriers' Arms*," said Dick, "and I am come to fetch you. Make haste, and put on your things, and let us be off."

'Dick was standing in an open space of ground about a dozen yards from the house, where his figure could be plainly made out; a little to his left, and a few yards further from the house, was an outbuilding belonging to the station; and Madge, while Dick was speaking to her, distinctly saw the head and shoulders of a man protruded for a moment from behind the gable of the building, as though in the act of listening, and then withdrawn; the man, whoever he might be, evidently thinking that, as the night was so much overcast, it would be impossible for any one to see him from the house. With a woman's intuition, Madge at once felt that

the head and shoulders could belong to no one but Mr Kulp.

"I will be down in a minute or two," she called out to Dick in a hard shrill voice which she hardly recognised as her own.

'She came in, shut down the window, and replaced the blind, and stood for a moment with the fingers of both hands pressed against her eyes, thinking intently. Then taking up the candle, she carried it into her father's bedroom, the window of which looked in the direction opposite to her own; but instead of proceeding to put on her bonnet and shawl, she stole back into her own dark room, and drew the blind about an inch on one side, and looked out. It was as she had thought; there were two of them; and at the moment she looked out they were talking earnestly together, as they stood close to the gable of the outbuilding; but next minute Dick seemed to push the stranger back out of sight, and came forward himself, and took up his first position, close to the house, waiting for Madge to come out.

'Madge stood up in a maze of doubt and fear. Why had not Dick come alone? And who was that other man hidden away behind the gable with Dick's connivance? Why, in fact, if Dick's story were true, need there be any concealment at all?

'But while she was debating thus, she said to herself, her father might perhaps be dying, hungering for her presence, and she allowing herself to be held back by some vague fears of—she knew not what. But, then, why that mystery? What must she do?—what must she do?

"Are you ready?" called Dick; and then there came a sharp imperious summons with his knuckles on the door below; and then the door itself was tried; but it was locked.

'Madge started out of her brief reverie, opened her bedroom window, and looked out for the second time. "Do make haste!" exclaimed Dick the moment her head was

protruded from the window. "How long are you going to be?"

"Answer me one question," said Madge—"Did you come up from the village alone? Is there any one here besides yourself? You know, Dick, that I am easily frightened—and—the hour is late, and—and"——

'He did not allow her to finish, but burst into a loud grating laugh.

"Alone! Quite alone, Madge, dear. I ran up from the village at a break-neck pace, and haven't seen a soul, except your own sweet self, since I left the *Farriers' Arms*."

"Dick Carradus, you are just telling me a heap of lies!" answered Madge; "though why you should do so, I cannot tell. I don't believe that my father has been taken ill, as you say; and I am quite certain that you are not alone."

'Before Dick could reply, the hidden man burst out into the moonlight, revealing Mr Kulp to Madge's straining eyes. She had felt certain from the first that it could be no other.

"Come, stow all that jabber!" exclaimed Kulp brutally. "If you had been guided by me"—this to Dick—"we should have had what we came for before now; but you must needs go to work in your own idiotic way; and see the result—all this precious time wasted, and nothing done!—Look you here, young woman!" turning to Madge; "you need not expect your father home just at present; he's disposed of, where he'll trouble nobody for some time to come. There's not a soul within a mile of you, except us two—two fellows who don't stick at trifles, against a wisp of a girl who gives tongue if she sees a mouse suddenly. Now, we've nothing against you yourself; we don't wish to do you any harm. What we've come for is the money we know you have in the house—not the old man's own money, but the money belonging to the railway. You can drop it quietly out of the window, if you like—we know within a quid or two how much there is—and we'll take our leave at once;

and you'll be none the poorer—it will only be the railway that will suffer, and they can afford it. But offer any resistance, or try on any of your tricks, and we'll not only have the money, but your life into the bargain. Won't we, mate?"

'Dick muttered some inaudible words in reply, and sat down sullenly on a pile of sleepers close at hand.

'The idea of any one thinking it worth while to rob the station, had never entered the head of Madge; but as Kulp spoke, she remembered that there was that night a much larger sum of money in the house than had ever been there before. Dick, from his frequent visits to the station, was doubtless well aware that old David was in the habit of keeping the cash in his bedroom, as a security against thieves. All these thoughts passed through her brain while Kulp was speaking. When he had done, she gave one great despairing sob, wrung from her by the thought of her lover's treachery, and her heart for the moment seemed to wither up within her. But the necessity for immediate action was pressing—she would have time enough in the dark future before her to brood over her sweetheart's baseness. What must she do? If her father was not ill, as these men had at first averred, then why had he not come home? He had never, even when most overcome, stayed out till this hour. Was it not possible—nay, probable—that they had murdered him first, to get him out of the way, and had then come on to the station to complete their work by robbery, and perhaps murder, there?

'A rude summons from Kulp cut short her brief reverie. "Now, young woman, what are you about? Do you expect us to wait here all night?"

"O Dick, for pity's sake, tell me what has become of my father?" she said, still speaking through the window, and heedless for the moment of Kulp.

'Dick rose from his seat as if he were going to reply, but Kulp waved him back. "Your father's disposed of where

he'll trouble nobody, as I told you before. And now let us have your answer at once. Do you mean to give us that money quietly, or not?"

"No—a thousand times no!" exclaimed Madge passionately. "Cowards that you are, come and take it, if you dare!" and she shut down the window with a bang, as though disdaining further parley.

'The thought of her father lying wounded, perhaps dead, in some lonely spot, lent her a courage, a reckless audacity, that made her for the time almost indifferent to anything that could happen to herself. What means of defence had she? was her first question. Scarcely any. The doors and windows, indeed, down-stairs were fastened; but she knew well that they would not stand long against the assaults of two men determined on effecting an entrance. There were no arms of any kind in the house. There was the door at the bottom of the stairs opening into the kitchen—she might, perhaps, do a little towards securing that. The candle was still burning where she had left it; and as she went into the room, the cash-box containing the cause of all these misfortunes stared her in the face. Her father's keys lay beside it, together with a bag containing the silver and copper retained by David as change. A flash of inspiration came to her as she looked at these things. She opened the cash-box, and took out the bag containing the day's receipts in notes, cheques, and gold, and concealed it in the bosom of her dress. She then put the bag containing the silver and copper into the box, locked it, and threw the keys under the bed. Her next proceeding was to secure the frail door at the foot of the staircase as well as she was able, by inserting a small wooden peg above the latch, so as to hinder any one from opening it in the ordinary way; and then by piling against it several chairs and other light articles of bedroom furniture, such as her limited strength permitted her to lift. She was well aware that even then it was a protection which

a few minutes would suffice to demolish ; but every minute was a gain in her desperate strait ; her only hope lay in prolonging the struggle as much as possible—help might come, she knew not how or whence, when least expected.

‘Outside, everything remained quiet. Could it be possible that they would, after all, go away without attacking the house? With this blessed hope beating warmly at her heart, Madge ran back to the window of her own room, and peeped through. Alas ! no—both of them were still there. They were stooping over a heap of sleepers deposited close at hand for the purpose of relaying the line ; and having selected one, they lifted it on to their shoulders, and brought it thus to the door of the house. At the first stroke of this novel but powerful battering-ram, Madge gave a little shriek, and sank, white and trembling, to the ground : all her little stock of courage had vanished, and she seemed, for the first time, to realise the dangers of her position. Like the blows of a pavior’s rammer came the shocks against the door downstairs, and to each of them Madge’s heart beat with a responsive throb. Suddenly, with a great crash, the door gave way, and with a yell of triumph, Kulp burst into the house, followed by his silent companion. Madge started up, and double-locked her bedroom door ; then rushed to the window, determined to leap out at any cost, and forgetting for the moment that the window, small in itself, was still further secured by a bar of iron running across its centre, sufficient to prevent even her little body from squeezing through.

‘With a cry of despair, she turned away from the window, and then, a moment after, almost laughed to herself—so sudden are the alternations of feeling at such a time—to think that she had forgotten all about the little loft over the bedrooms. Surely there, of all places in the house, since it was evident that from the house itself there was now no escape, she would be more secure. It was a mere cock-loft,

open to the sloping rafters of the roof, and lighted by a skylight composed of a single pane of glass ; it was used by David as a storehouse for his onions, seeds, and various kinds of rubbish put away at odd times by the old man, as never likely to be wanted again ; but to Madge, in that hour of her extremity, it seemed a very harbour of refuge. The short broken ladder by which David gained access to it was always kept behind his bedroom door. She unlocked the door of her own room, got the ladder, and placed it against the wall under the opening into the loft, which shewed black and grim above her head, there being no door to it or fastening of any kind.

‘ Madge paused for a minute before going up the ladder. After feeling that the money was still safe in the bosom of her dress, she went lightly into her father’s room, and blew out the candle, which had been burning there since first taken out of her own room ; she next locked the doors of both rooms, put the keys in her pocket, and then stood to listen, with one foot on the ladder, ready to ascend. From the moment the front-door was burst in, to that in which Madge stood thus, not more than two minutes had elapsed ; sufficient, however, for the two men down-stairs to ransack every corner, and so make sure, before proceeding further, that Madge was hidden nowhere below. The door at the foot of the stairs was tried next ; and the moment Madge heard this, she mounted the ladder noiselessly, and creeping through the opening into the loft with the agility of a cat, reached down with one hand, drew up the ladder after her, and then sat down by the edge of the opening to await, with a heart that beat almost to bursting, whatever might happen next. The door not yielding easily, the battering-ram was applied to it, and half-a-dozen blows were sufficient to break it off its hinges. The furniture piled up behind it was quickly dragged down by the indefatigable Kulp, and the way to the bedrooms was then clear. Madge, listening

intently, heard Kulp inciting Dick to drink out of his brandy-flask ; after which he went in search of matches and a candle, for all their work hitherto had been done by the light of the clouded moon. Having procured a light, after a delay of some minutes, during which he relieved his mind by a large amount of swearing, Mr Kulp advanced cautiously up-stairs. Having reached the bedroom doors in safety, and finding both of them locked, Dick and he held a brief consultation. Dick was inclined to break into the old man's room first, being well aware that the money was always put there overnight ; but Mr Kulp, whose quick, restless eyes had caught sight of the opening into the loft, gave it as his opinion, emphasised with numerous oaths, that both bird and money would be found snugly hid away in that dark little nest at the top of the house ; so it was agreed that he should explore the loft while Dick effected an entrance into David's room. Mr Kulp's first task was to fetch a couple of chairs up-stairs, and having fixed one of them upon the other, he proceeded to climb carefully to the top, just as Dick succeeded in breaking open the bedroom door.

‘Madge, in her hiding-place, sat quite motionless, with straining eyes fixed on the opening in the floor, through which she momentarily expected to see Mr Kulp's ugly head protruded. The clouds had partly cleared away by this time, and sufficient of the moon's light came through the little skylight to enable her to distinguish the objects about her with tolerable clearness. She heard Mr Kulp climbing laboriously on to the chairs, and thought to herself that a few seconds now would surely end all, for she never doubted that he would murder her when once he got her into his power. The first part of Mr Kulp's person that made its appearance through the trap was an immense bony hand, with which he seized the ledge, as a help in pulling himself up. Close to the feet of Madge lay an old wooden mallet ; on the instinct of the moment, and without pausing to think,

she grasped it, and brought it down with all her force on the hideous claw beside her. Mr Kulp gave a yell of mingled rage and pain, and being obliged to let go his hold, came to the floor with a terrific crash. He was on his feet in an instant, swearing horribly that he would have Madge's blood ; but just as he was preparing to mount the chairs again, Dick, with a joyful cry, burst out of David's room, exclaiming that he had found the cash-box. Even then Mr Kulp was half inclined to stay at all risks, and have his revenge, for his hand hurt him terribly ; but Dick hurried down-stairs with the box under his arm, and Mr Kulp's cupidity rendering him fearful that unless he quickly followed, he might perhaps never see either Dick or the box again, he postponed the consideration of his revenge till a future period, and hurried after his friend, threatening Madge with what he would do to her if she stirred out of the loft or gave any alarm, for a full hour at the least.

'Madge's ruse had succeeded. Deceived by the weight of the box, they had hurried away without opening it, thinking that it contained the money of which they were in search, whereas it held only the bag of silver and copper placed there purposely by Madge. But Madge knew that the respite was only a short one : they would not go far before breaking open the box, and on discovering the deception, they would hurry back, and woe be to her if they found her there when they returned !

'She would get out of the house at any risk, and try to make her escape across the fields. She lowered the ladder, and after feeling that the money was still safe in the bosom of her dress, got down as quickly as possible, and so groped her way down-stairs, and through the house on to the platform. In a few minutes more, the night-mail would be due ; but alas ! it did not stop at Birkwood, nor even slackened speed, but rushed past in complete indifference to the existence of any such insignificant spot.

‘An excellent thought! she would turn on the red light at the signal, and stop the train. Under the circumstances, she felt herself justified in doing this. Perhaps the train with its living freight would come up in time to save her from the two miscreants, who would certainly be back in a few minutes more. The hope was a faint one, but she could not afford to throw it away. To reach the semaphore, it was necessary that she should traverse the platform to that end of it nearest the road taken by the two men on leaving the station, although her first intention had been to try to make her escape by hurrying away in the opposite direction. There was, however, no time to hesitate; the risk must be run at once, if at all. So she sped as fast as she could to the end of the platform, and seizing the iron handle of the immense signal-post, gave it the necessary turn, which changed the glass in front of the lantern at its summit, and displayed the red light in place of the white one. She had just turned to hasten back along the platform, when Kulp and Carradus, leaping over a hedge about twenty yards away, came suddenly upon her, and a loud cry from one of them proclaimed that she was seen.

‘In their hurry to get back to the station, after discovering the trick that had been played them, they had cut off the angle of the road by coming across a field, and were consequently unseen by Madge till they were close upon her. Madge was like a wounded animal brought to bay: to flee was useless, she would have been caught before she had run twenty yards; resistance was equally out of the question; what resistance, in fact, could a girl like her offer to the will of two desperate ruffians? There seemed nothing left for her but to lie down in dumb despair, and pray that her misery might be as short as possible. As she stood thus, her fine and practised ear caught the first faint sound of the approaching train—only five minutes more, and she would have been saved!

She was still standing close to the semaphore. On the instant, she turned, and despite the impediment of her dress, ran quickly up the iron ladder—up, up to the very top, till she sank exhausted on the little grating fixed close under the lamps for the convenience of lighting and cleaning them. Mr Kulp laughed loud and long.

“What a precious fool the wench must be,” he said with an oath, “to go and fix herself in a trap like that ! Now I shall have her as safe as a ’possum in a gum-tree—have her money and her life both, or my name is not Jared Kulp !”

“Not her life, Kulp—not her life,” said Dick. “Let the poor child go, when you have got the money.”

“You shut up for a prating fool, Dick Carradus !” exclaimed Kulp savagely. “Had she smashed your fingers as she has mine, you’d be as eager for your revenge as I am. Besides,” he added sullenly, “if we don’t throttle her off, she’ll blab and we shall get lagged. No half-work, say I.”

“Perhaps, after all, she hasn’t got the money about her,” said Dick ; “it may be hidden in the old man’s room—under the bed, or in the chimney, or somewhere.”

“Ay, ay, lad—do you think so ?” said Kulp eagerly. “Then you just go, and have a hunt about, and I’ll wait here at the bottom of the ladder, till you come back, to see that my lady doesn’t escape. Only don’t be a month away.”

“Never fear,” answered Dick, and hurried off into the house.

Neither of the men had yet heard the noise of the advancing train, for the wind was in the opposite direction ; but Madge heard it coming nearer and nearer, but so slowly, as it seemed to her hungering ears, that her heart within her grew sick with fear that it would not arrive in time to save her. No sooner had Dick disappeared than Mr Kulp drew a formidable bowie-knife from some hidden pocket, and having unsheathed it, seized the black haft between his teeth, and prepared to ascend the ladder : he had evidently

determined not to await the return of Dick, but to accomplish his revenge while his companion was away. His right hand had been so badly hurt by Madge, that he had been obliged to bind his handkerchief round it, and every movement elicited a groan of agony, and hardened him in the dark purpose on which he was bent. So, with the knife grasped between his teeth, he began slowly and cautiously to climb the ladder. He had made but two steps upward, when all at once his ear caught the shrill whistle of the approaching train, and he knew that his work must be done quickly, or else left undone for ever.

‘The red signal had been seen.

‘Madge, crouching on the little iron grating under the lamps, and kept from falling by the rail running round it, had not been idle all this time.

‘A day or two previously, the semaphore ladder had been removed for repairs, and an old one temporarily substituted in its place, fastened with a stout rope at the top to keep it firm. Madge’s nimble fingers were busy with the knots before Kulp began to ascend ; but the rope was thick, and the knots difficult to unfasten, and she shuddered to think that Kulp would reach the top before her purpose could be effected. She had contrived to undo one of the knots, and was busy with fingers and teeth at the second, while Kulp was coming slowly up the ladder towards her. Step by step he drew nearer. She tried to call to him, to warn him of the fate before him, but beyond a dry husky whisper, she had lost all power of speech. The light from the lamp above her shone obliquely on his shaggy head, his cruel wolfish eyes staring ferociously up at her, and the bare knife held between his teeth. Half a minute more, and he would have seized her, when, yielding to her last desperate effort, the knot gave way ; the rope fell to the ground ; and the ladder, no longer held in its place, and already trembling under the weight of Kulp, shook for an instant ; then its top glided slowly along

the smooth edge of the grating, till it slipped over the end, and fell swiftly through the air, with the terrified wretch clinging to it ; and coming down with a terrible crash on the coping-stone at the edge of the platform, rolled over with its burden on to the line, just as the wildly-shrieking train forged slowly into the station, and came to a dead stand a few feet from the lifeless body lying across its path.

‘I, who tell you this, happened to be travelling by the mail that night, and was quickly out of the train, followed by several of the passengers, to ascertain the reason of a stoppage so unusual.

‘It was Will Ferguson who picked up the body of Kulp from before the engine. A medical man, one of the passengers, pronounced him to be dead.

‘Some time elapsed before Madge, lying insensible so far above our heads, was discovered ; and then, it was a task of considerable difficulty to get her down, but it was managed after a time, and the poor girl was laid on her bed, unconscious of all that was being done for her ; and when she did awake from her state of insensibility, it was only to lapse into a brain fever, from which she did not thoroughly recover for several months.

‘Old David turned up in the morning, haggard and penitent. He had been lying dead-drunk under a hedge all night, where Kulp and Carradus had purposely left him. Carradus himself got clear away, and has never been heard of from that day to this. The railway company made Madge a handsome present as soon as she got well again ; but they removed her father from a situation for which he was evidently incompetent, and made him ticket-collector at Wallington Junction ; at which station Madge was, at her own request, installed as booking-clerk ; but I hear that she and Will Ferguson are about to be married ; so that next time you come this way, perhaps, there will be no Madge Carliston to serve you with a ticket.’



A GREAT JEWEL-ROBBERY.

SOME years ago, people used to prophesy that in consequence of the Californian gold discovery the precious metal would be precious no longer, but fall to a par with, if not below, silver in value. But in spite of the golden treasures of California, supplemented by those of Australia, a sovereign is still worth its twenty shillings. But, as a dealer in precious stones, I have often thought of what would be the consequence should some tremendous deposit of diamonds be laid bare ; for we are not bound to suppose that these precious crystals of carbon are everywhere so sparsely scattered over the earth's surface as to render the quest one of patience and difficulty. Imagine, for instance, some pebbly mountain stream, whose pebbles were all Koh-i-noors, Stars of the South, and Great Pitt Diamonds ! What consternation amongst the holders of family heir-looms, whose glittering clusters have been handed down from generation to generation, and valued at so many thousands sterling—what horror to find that, by the glut in the market, those thousands sank to hundreds, to tens, to units at last, or merely the value of the cutting ! That lady who described the wearing of diamonds as an exquisite pleasure, but too painful, from the risks incurred, would be then able to wear her precious jewels in peace.

I will not mention the name of the Bond Street firm with which I was some years ago connected, but let it suffice that their name was well known, and that the manufacture of more than one regal diadem had been intrusted to their skilled workmen. I was with them some twelve or fourteen years, and it was during that period that the incident I am about to relate occurred. As a matter of course, the strictest injunctions respecting care, caution, and watchfulness are issued to all the employés, especially to those whose daily business brings them into contact with the public ; and being always in the show-rooms myself, I was one of those in whom the elders of the firm placed confidence. The consequence was, that being tolerably thoughtful, sharp of eye, and a good judge of gems, I rose to occupy one of the most responsible positions, and to me were always intrusted those rather delicate, critical, and caution-demanding embassies, where customers wished for jewels to be sent to their houses for inspection.

In course of time, a little feeling of jealousy sprang up ; but it did not trouble me, for, either from extra care, or from good fortune, I had not in any single case been the cause of loss to my employers—a state of satisfaction hardly to be enjoyed by either of my brother-assistants, so many, so ingenious, and so carefully contrived were, in those days, the plans for defrauding the great jewellers. I do not know that any very great improvement has taken place of late years ; but my experience is with the past, and I relate accordingly. In fact, so many were the tricks, that when a visitor came to the show-rooms, the first question we had to ask was : ‘ Is this a lady or a sharper ? ’

Very often the swindlers, or thieves, were easy to detect ; for though dressed in the extreme of fashion, and arriving perhaps in a brougham, there would be some slip of the tongue—some vulgarism—which would betray them. Frequently, a misplaced *h*, or a wrongly applied verb, has raised

suspicious, which defeated a carefully planned swindle, and sent the disappointed ones to lament their ill success, or often to jail. But with all care, the jewellers' enemies are so many, and their losses so heavy, that, in spite of enormous profits, the balance-sheets at the end of the year are not so satisfactory as is supposed for those who follow this artistic business. Now a well-dressed couple would come and look at some rings, turn them over for half an hour, and then leave, declaring that there was nothing to suit; when perhaps before, more often after, their departure, one or two valuable gems have been missed—taken no one could tell how. Twice over, assistants allowed jewels to be taken into the next room, at some hotel, to shew a sick lady, and came back ruefully to announce that the sick, as well as the sound, lady had disappeared. Times out of number, ring, chain, or bracelet has been snatched from counter or table; once such a thing happened when I was in waiting, but a presented pistol stopped the marauder before he reached the door—a door already bolted by the porter; and my friend was committed for trial, and afterwards transported. One select company of visitors purchased goods to the amount of nine hundred pounds, when the gentleman of the party wrote a cheque on the spot for the amount—Drummonds of Charing Cross being his bankers—but as I objected to the jewels being taken away until the cheque was honoured, I was courteously told to send them to Morley's Hotel, and half sorry to be compelled to shew the distrust, I bowed the distinguished customers out.

'Here, Johnson,' I said to one of our men, 'run down at once to Drummonds, and present this cheque; take a cab.'

In half an hour Johnson was back with the cheque branded with the words 'No effects.'

I received an invitation to dine with the head of our firm after that, and returned home at night wearing a very handsome gold watch. 'A reward for your shrewdness,' said the

old gentleman, clapping me on the shoulder. 'You'll be in the firm yet, Willis, that you will.'

'I hope I may,' I thought, as I went home that night ; but the happy consummation never arrived, since I was but mortal, and, like other men, liable to be deceived ; though, upon maturer consideration, I don't think I was very well used.

I was seated one day busily examining some stones which were to be reset for the Countess of Maraschino, when the principal came softly in.

'Lock those up, Willis,' he said, 'and go and attend to those parties in the front show-room. Thomas is with them, and I don't half like their looks.'

I hurried into the show-room to relieve Mr Thomas of his task, which he gave up with a very bad grace, and proceeded to listen to the demands of a tall lady and gentleman in black, both of whom wore respirators, and spoke in low husky voices. The gentleman looked very pale and ill, and the lady was very closely veiled as to the upper part of her face ; but upon my approach she threw up her fall, and displayed the bright bold eyes of a very handsome woman.

'Don't look suspicious,' I thought, as I evaded the glance directed at me ; for our rule is not to look at eyes, but hands—or rather fingers, which sometimes excite suspicions. In this case, though, the lady's were *bien gantée*, and the gentleman's thin, white, and soft—an invalid's hands, in fact, and I proceeded to listen to their demands.

'Well, Lilla, what's it to be ?' said the gentleman.

'I thought you had decided, love,' was the reply. 'Something simple, and not too expensive now, whatever we may decide upon hereafter. Why not keep to what you said—a bracelet, or a cross ?'

'Well, shew me some bracelets,' the gentleman said. 'We do not want anything of high price, but something

pretty, light, and suited for a young lady of eighteen, about to be married.'

I proceeded to open case after case of bracelets of all prices, from ten to five hundred guineas each ; but though they were fastidious and hard to please, I was bound to confess that the lady's taste was excellent, and that the gentleman was no mean connoisseur in gems.

'I rather like that,' said the gentleman at last, selecting a very pretty but slight bracelet, set with a sapphire, surrounded by pearls. 'What is the price?'

'That is sixty guineas,' I said.

'Yes, it's pretty enough,' said the lady ; 'but not sufficiently good.'

'You mean not valuable enough,' said the gentleman ; 'but you know the old proverb about the gift-horse. Lucille will not study the value, depend upon it ; and besides, I don't see anything I like half so well.'

'Have it then, dear,' was the reply ; and then, directly after, 'Ah, what a sweet cross !' exclaimed the lady, looking at an enamel and gold ornament lying in a case—and which I immediately opened—for I must confess I had almost forgotten our principal's suspicions.

'It is a sweet little thing !' exclaimed the lady, examining the cross ; 'such a fine pearl, too, in the centre. I should like it.'

'What, to give to Lucille ?' said the gentleman smiling.

'No ; of course not. I fancied it myself.'

'My dear Lilla, this is not a linendraper's shop,' said the gentleman with a shrug, and then there was a smile and a whisper between them.

'What is the price of the cross ?' said the gentleman at last.

'Fifty guineas,' I said.

'It seems a good deal for so small an ornament,' said the gentleman, turning and re-turning the cross ; but I explained

that the size of the pearls increased its value ; and after a little hesitation, he decided to take it, when I saw that he was rewarded by a quiet pressure of the hand from his companion, whose eyes then met mine almost mirthfully for a moment.

‘You’re a nice creature, I expect,’ muttered I to myself ; ‘coax him out of everything you fancy, and then laugh in your sleeve.’ But my eyes were wanted to guard the valuable assortment of jewellery displayed, and they were back the next instant to business.

‘Where can I send these, sir ?’ I inquired.

‘Ah ! we’ll take them,’ said the lady ; ‘we will not trouble you to send.’

I explained that it would be no trouble, but they held to their determination ; and upon payment being requested, the gentleman drew out a cheque-book, asked for pen and ink, and wrote a cheque for one hundred and ten guineas upon a small City bank.

Now it was that my lips became a little tighter, and I felt that the principal had had some cause for his suspicions ; and thoroughly on my guard, I took the cheque, and explained that it was a rule of the establishment that goods should not be delivered until after a cheque had been presented.

‘Ah, quite right, quite right,’ said the gentleman quietly, and without displaying the slightest annoyance. ‘I can easily suppose that you are obliged to be careful.’

But the lady looked angry, and returned my bow very distantly, as I ushered them out, having promised to send the purchases on to the fashionable hotel—Moore’s, in Brook Street—at which they were staying.

‘All a farce, but well carried out,’ I said to the principal as he came up to me, and I shewed him the cheque and the card given me, bearing the name ‘Mr H. Elliston Ross,’ and in pencil, ‘Moore’s Hotel.’ ‘But we’ll send the cheque all the same.—Here, Johnson.’

The principal shrugged his shoulders ; and as Johnson came up to where I was carefully running over the various items of jewellery, to see that nothing had been stolen, I gave him the cheque, and he went Cityward.

To my great satisfaction, all was right ; not a jewel missing, and the purchased cases lying by me. Suddenly, a cold chill shot through me. Had they contrived to abstract the contents ? I tore the little morocco boxes open ; but, no—all was correct. Cross and bracelet lay upon their white velvet beds ; and so far, everything was perfectly satisfactory. If they were swindlers, we had escaped ; and I began to wonder whether I should get another invitation to dinner, a chain for my watch, and be told that I was a step nearer to the junior partnership.

To our intense astonishment though, at an hour's end, Johnson returned smiling.

‘ All right, sir,’ he said.

‘ Why, you don't mean ———

‘ All right, sir,’ he said. ‘ Cheque cashed in an instant : hundred and fifteen pounds, ten shillings.’

It is almost needless to add that the two little cases were sent immediately to the hotel, and a discussion followed respecting unnecessary suspicion, and how very often it happened that swindlers passed unnoticed, while honest people were suspected.

A month passed, when one cold January day I was in the show-room, and the same lady made her appearance alone. She still wore her respirator, but looked very pale, haggard, and troubled. The bold look seemed to have gone from her eyes ; and as I recalled my thoughts, I felt that I had misjudged her, for she began to speak tenderly of her husband, Mr Ross, who was lying very ill at the hotel.

‘ I have brought back the cross to be repaired,’ she said, drawing the little morocco case from her rich sable muff. ‘ The ring was too slight, and it broke from my necklet the

second time it was worn. I had a narrow escape of losing it; but Mr Ross found it himself upon the lawn, trodden into the grass. I thought I would leave it until we came up again. Of course, you can repair it?’

I expressed my sorrow, and promised to have it seen to at once.

‘You need not hurry for a few days. Mr Ross is in town to consult Sir Ealing Dean, and I fear he will send us to Madeira. This climate is killing my poor husband.’

The distant hauteur was all gone; and in a ladylike, courteous manner, our customer bowed to my few sympathetic remarks, and hints of its being an unusually trying season, &c.

‘Our friend was delighted with the little bracelet, a gift which Mr Ross wishes to supplement with something a little more valuable. Perhaps I could be allowed to select a few things for you to submit to his choice at the hotel? I know his taste now pretty well, and it will save trouble.’

‘Anything you like to select shall be sent, ma’am,’ I said; and I then proceeded to open and display to their best advantage some very valuable bracelets, which were one and all rejected.

‘Yes,’ she said sadly, ‘they are very handsome; but Mr Ross would not like them, I am sure, and it is useless to take things on that he would not approve. His taste was always good; and as his health fails, it seems to have acquired an indescribable tone that I cannot explain, except that it is artistic, and dreamy.’

I brought out some plain but good pearl and diamond ornaments in suites, one suite in particular taking her attention.

‘Yes; I like that. You might send that.’

‘It is a suite made to order; but it could be made again in a very short time,’ I said.

‘That would not do,’ she said, ‘unless it could be supplied in a fortnight.’

‘I think we could get over that difficulty,’ I said with a smile ; and then bracelets, rings, chains, and watches—certainly the most chaste and elegant we had—were selected and put aside.

‘It is only fair to say,’ said the lady smiling—at least, I could see that she was smiling, in spite of her respirator—‘that Mr Ross will not purchase many of these elegant ornaments. I know he would like a watch and chain, and a ring. Perhaps, too, if he admired them, one of those pearl suites ; but I thought it better to speak, as since his illness he has become, not irritable—but—but—perhaps a little hard to please, and I should be sorry if he rejected everything you brought.’

So much delicacy was displayed in these remarks, that I could only courteously assure her that we should only be too happy to attend again and again upon Mr Ross, till we had hit upon something he admired ; and upon promising to send the selected goods on the next morning at eleven, our visitor rose to go.

‘I would ask you to send this afternoon,’ said the lady, on rising, ‘but I don’t think Mr Ross quite well enough. He saw our physician this morning, and the interviews are always very trying to his nerves.’

I placed the little cross in the workmen’s hands for repair ; and the next morning, punctually at eleven, I was at Moore’s Hotel, accompanied by a porter with a goodly assortment of jewellery.

A few words with the manager set me quite at ease, though my inquiries were a mere matter of form. Mr Elliston Ross lived in Yorkshire, owned coal mines, and was in town to visit the court physician, Sir Ealing Dean ; had been there once before for the same reason : perfect gentleman ; his lady quite an angel—waited on him night and day.

I was shewn into the room where Mrs Ross was seated—

this time without her respirator. She rose with a sad smile and motioned me to a seat ; while putting on her respirator, she went into the next room, remaining absent a few minutes ; and then returning, requested me to bring in my cases for Mr Ross to see.

I had left the porter down-stairs ; so, taking up the two small leathern boxes, I followed Mrs Ross into a slightly shaded room, where, looking deathly pale, the gentleman who had visited our place of business lay upon a couch reading the *Times*. He was attired in a blue cloth dressing-gown, and had a small table drawn up to his side, on which were a bottle, glass, and a caraffe which seemed to contain barley-water. He too wore a respirator ; but he removed it for a few moments to take a little of the barley-water, and then carefully replaced it, coughing hollowly the while.

‘Sorry to bring you into a sick-room,’ he said courteously. ‘Sorry, in fact, to bring you here at all, for I would much rather have chosen the trifle or two I wanted at your shop. I trust you have not brought many things, though ?’

‘Only a few that Mrs Ross thought you—that your lady chose, sir,’ I said.

He nodded, and then listlessly examined first one and then another ornament, as I opened them out, but always with a dissatisfied air.

‘Don’t you like those, dear ?’ said Mrs Ross, in rather disappointed tones, as I displayed in the best lights the pearl suite.

‘No ; not at all,’ said the invalid. ‘Too plain ; almost vulgar.’

‘Might I be allowed to suggest,’ I said earnestly, ‘that to see pearls to advantage, they must be worn. It is a well-known fact that pearls are gems which shew to as great advantage upon a dark as upon a fair complexion ; and if your lady’——

I paused here, and glanced towards Mrs Ross, who

smiled graciously, and then clasped the bracelets round her shapely wrist, the necklace over her fine throat, and placed the tiara in her hair—looking almost regal as she stood before us.

‘You see the difference,’ I said, drawing back.

‘Yes, yes,’ said the invalid impatiently; ‘they look well enough on her; but they are for quite a girl.—Take them off, Lilla.’

Mrs Ross obeyed, and the ornaments were replaced in the case; when I proceeded to display the other jewels, but apparently to find no favour.

‘Here, Lilla, give me a glass of sherry.—Confound this thing, it almost chokes me.’ He tore off the respirator, and hurled it to the other end of the room.

‘For my sake, dear,’ I heard her whisper to him, as, stepping lightly across the room, she picked up the respirator, and brought it back.

‘Well, there; get out the sherry, then,’ he said pettishly, as he took back the instrument.

‘No, no, dear; Sir Ealing said’——

‘Confound Sir Ealing! If I am to die, let me die comfortably, and not be tortured to death. Get out the sherry, I say—the port too.’

I saw a tear trickle down Mrs Ross’s cheek as she fetched a couple of decanters from a sideboard where they stood with glasses.

‘Haven’t you some cake, or did you send it down?’ he said impatiently.

‘I have it here, dear,’ said Mrs Ross softly; and she placed a portion of a small pound-cake upon the table.

‘Give me a glass of sherry,’ he said impatiently.—‘No, not that glass—the other.—Mr—I don’t know your name—try that sherry.’ He sipped a little. ‘You’ll find it very good.’

‘I thank you,’ I said quietly; ‘but I never take wine in business hours.’

‘Won’t you try the port, then?’ he said.

‘I would much rather not,’ I replied.

‘A little cake?’ suggested the lady. ‘We are simple country people, and not much acquainted with London etiquette. Pray, excuse us if we trespass.’

I bowed, and declined, when Mrs Ross re-adjusted her husband’s respirator, leaning over him the while.

‘Now, let me see that bracelet,’ said Mr Ross, pointing to one upon the table.—‘But are these all you have brought?’

‘Yes, sir,’ I said; ‘but I can easily bring a fresh selection’—though I had brought over two thousand pounds’ worth.

‘Hem, yes,’ he said; ‘of course!—Do you like that bracelet, Lilla?’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs Ross; ‘I picked it out particularly yesterday. That emerald is so beautiful.’

‘Put it on,’ he said curtly; and she clasped it upon her arm.

‘How much?’ he said shortly.

‘Thirty-five guineas,’ I replied.

‘Dear,’ he said—‘very dear. The bracelet we bought at the shop was far more handsome at the same money.’

‘No, love; it was sixty guineas,’ said Mrs Ross.

‘Ah! was it? I forgot,’ he said carelessly. ‘Well, lay that aside: I don’t want you to come for nothing.’

I hastened to assure him that it was the wish of the firm to satisfy their patrons, as well as to sell their jewellery, and that we should only be too happy to bring or send on a fresh selection for his choice.

He assented almost rudely, and turned over the various rings, asking the prices of nearly every article I had brought, when, suddenly throwing himself impatiently back, he exclaimed: ‘Good heavens, Lilla, this room is insufferable; throw some of that vinegar about.’

Mrs Ross smiled faintly; and taking a flexible tube from the mantelpiece, she pressed it, so that in a fine shower a

finely scented aromatic vinegar diffused a refreshing perfume through the room.

‘That’s better,’ he exclaimed.—‘Now, shew me those pearls again. How much did you say they were?’

‘Four hundred guineas the suite,’ I said, hastening to lay them before him.

‘There, take them away!’ he exclaimed. ‘I can’t afford four hundred guineas: four hundred shillings more likely. That confounded doctor is ruining me. Let me look at the watches; or, stay, let me look at the pearls again.—No; never mind. I won’t have them unless you will take half the money.’

I smiled and shook my head. ‘We are not dealers of that sort, sir,’ I ventured to say.

‘I don’t know—I don’t know. I believe you jewellers get most terrible profits. Shew me the watches.’

I was hastening to place the half-dozen I had with me in his hands, when he exclaimed again: ‘Insufferable! Have you any more of that vinegar, Lilla?’

Mrs Ross nodded; and taking a cut-glass bottle from her pocket, she placed it with a handkerchief by his side.

‘No, no,’ he said, giving me back the watches. ‘Sprinkle the room with another of those tubes.—Now, you! I’ll have that little plain watch. I’m getting tired of this. Let me have a chain to match—a fine one, mind—the thinnest you have—and that will do for to-day.’

As I selected four or five chains, after putting the watch aside, Mrs Ross took up another tube, unscrewed it, and then appeared to be taking especial notice of the chains which I bore across to the invalid.

‘Those are sweetly pretty,’ she exclaimed. ‘I don’t remember noticing them so much yesterday.’

As she spoke, she stood close to my side, when the invalid exclaimed impatiently: ‘There, pray, be quick dear;’ and at one and the same moment, he poured out the contents of his

bottle upon his handkerchief, and I felt a fine spray of a peculiar odour playing right in my nostrils.

I started back, gasping and astounded, when, leaping from the couch, the invalid exclaimed: 'Good heavens, sir, you are unwell;' and he covered my face and nose with the wet handkerchief, forcing me backwards into a chair.

I believe that I struggled, but only feebly; for a strange, delicious, enervating languor was stealing over me; I saw things mistily, but still with an understanding mind, seeing, though unable to move hand or foot, that the invalid was bending over me, while Mrs Ross was hastily placing the various articles of jewellery in her pocket.

I saw all that, but in a dreamy untroubled way, for it seemed then to be not of the slightest consequence—not to concern me. Then I have some recollection of an intensely cold sensation as of water being poured upon my face, while my next impression is of hearing a closing door and the click of a lock.

How long I remained in that condition, I never knew; but by degrees I woke to a feeling of deadly nausea: my head swam, my temples throbbed, and everything I gazed upon was seen through a mist of dancing motes. But by degrees thoughts of the present began to take the place of the dreamy imaginings of the past. I started up and looked around, to find that I was still in the inner room; but the jewels—the cases—where was the invalid—where Mrs Ross?

Was it true, or was it some strange vision? It was impossible that I could have been duped like that.

I ran to the door—fastened. The other door—locked on the outside. I darted across to the bell, but in doing so, caught my foot in the long table-cover, tripped and fell, dragging the cloth on to the carpet, and revealing the whole of the jewel-cases beneath the table, just as they had been hastily flung.

I could not help it then, for my brain was confused, and

stooping down, I took the cases, one by one, and opened them, in the fond hope that I had been deceived, and that I should find the jewels safe ; but, save one ring, which had escaped their notice, everything had been taken.

I sat on the carpet for a few minutes holding my throbbing head, and trying to recall the scene, but almost in vain, for it seemed as if a portion of my existence had been wiped completely away. I was shewing jewellery at one moment, the next it seemed that I was seated by the empty cases. I tried to clear my faculties, but in vain ; and I should think quite half an hour had elapsed before, thoroughly awakened to the fact that I had been robbed, I rang the bell.

I had nearly arrived at the extent of my loss two or three times, but only to have, as it were, a veil drawn over my senses, just as if a relapse were coming on ; and then mentally blind, I could do nothing but rock myself to and fro, trying to get rid of the remains of the strange stupor in which I had been plunged.

Before the waiter could ascend, I rang again.

‘Where are Mr and Mrs Ross ?’ I inquired.

‘Went out in a brougham some time ago, sir ; and your lunch is ready.’

‘My lunch !’ I exclaimed.

‘Yes, sir ; the lunch they ordered for you.’

‘Oh, thank you !’ I said quietly ; ‘I’ll ring again. Send my porter up in five minutes’ time.’

The waiter did not seem surprised that the door was fastened on the outside—it had not struck him then ; but as soon as he had gone, I hastily repacked the empty morocco cases, and as soon as possible made my way back into Bond Street, and met the principal.

‘We were just getting uneasy, Mr Willis, and going to send after you. What have they taken ?’

‘Everything, sir,’ I said almost fiercely.

‘What !’ he exclaimed.

I told all I knew, while he listened with blank amazement.

Then followed a visit to Great Scotland Yard, and to Moore's, to find that Mr and Mrs Ross had not returned; while so impressed was the manager with his visitors' respectability, that he laughed at the idea of there having been any swindling transaction. They were most respectable people, he said; paid their bill last time without a murmur; their portmanteaus and boxes up-stairs were all in their rooms; and it was all a mistake—'or something worse,' he added with a dark look at me.

That it was 'something worse,' was very soon evident, from the tubes and bottles, and a wine-glass containing a few drops of a limpid fluid, found to corroborate my story. But though the instruments of the deception, even to a couple of respirators, lined with wet sponge, were found, the depredators had made their escape, and were never found; though I verily believe that if I had watched the lady-swindlers in the various police courts, sooner or later I should have encountered the interesting Mrs Ross.

I need hardly add, that after so heavy a loss, the firm never seemed to take thoroughly to heart the ideas of a junior partnership with respect to myself; while as to my brother-assistants, they laughed in their sleeves at my downfall; though, after all, I cannot see that I was much to blame, this not being by any means the first Great Jewel-robbery.

THE END.

